

LIFE OF SRI RAMAKRISHNA

O. V. Sarveswara Rao

COMPILED FROM VARIOUS AUTHENTICAL
SOURCES

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PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

The aim of the book is to give to the public in English a short but comprehensive chronological account of the life of Sri Ramakrishna. Great as are the difficulties of faithfully delineating the life-history of any famous personage, they are almost insurmountable when the subject of the biography happens to be such a striking figure as Sri Ramakrishna. For it is a noteworthy fact that no man has been the subject of so many conflicting estimates as the Prophet of Dakshineswar. His personality was a combination of so many apparently contradictory elements that it is baffling to the superficial observer ; that is the reason that he has been so variously described as a maniac, a good soul, a devotee, a saint, a man of the highest realization, and an Incarnation of the Most High. It is impossible to give any presentation of his life that will be universally satisfying ; yet no one by words and actions satisfied so many as he. We are so accustomed to gauging everything by our pet standards that anything that does not measure up to them is summarily disposed of as fantastic or impossible. A biographer of Sri Ramakrishna, therefore, must content himself with adhering to the truth, and with the presentation of the actual facts, leaving it to the reader to form his own opinion of the Master.

This book closely follows the chronology and treatment of the great Bengali work in five volumes, *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Lilaprasanga* ("Discourses on the Life of Sri Ramakrishna"), by Swami Saradananda, a direct disciple of the Master, who is the Secretary of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission. We have purposely omitted some of the masterly expositions of abstruse points relating to the Master's life, as being too philosophical for the ordinary reader. Additional facts have been collected from the following Bengali sources: *Life of Sri Ramakrishna* by the late Ramchandra Datta, and the beautiful *Life in verse* by the late Akshay Kumar Sen, both disciples of the Master ; *Life of Sri Ramakrishna*, compiled from authentic records by the late Priyanath Sinha, alias Gurudas Varman, a disciple of Swami Vivekananda, with the assistance of the senior Swamis of the Ramakrishna Mission ; and the epoch-making work of Babu

Mahendra Nath Gupta, better known as M.—*the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, in four volumes, from which some valuable conversations have been taken in their entirety. The materials for the life-sketches of four of the living monastic disciples of the Master have been obtained at first hand. One or two other sources are mentioned in their respective places. To all these authors we express our deep indebtedness. Thus the present work combines the essential facts of all the authoritative books on the subject with important additions. Where our authorities have differed we have accepted the version most worthy of credence.

A word of explanation is necessary with regard to the free introduction of the "supernatural" element in the book. Our main reason is that we could not help it, for the supernatural is the domain of religion. What the microscope or the telescope does for the scientist, a pure and highly concentrated mind does for the Yogi. Both reveal the wonders of invisible worlds non-existent to the uninitiated—the man in the street. Everyone of the so-called supernatural visions recorded in the book is a fact, and as such demands recognition. Science, specially psychology, is as yet in its infancy, and it will be hampered in its progress if facts are withheld, simply because in its gropings it is not able to account for them. Instead of shutting his eyes to them, the seeker after truth will do well to work upon these data for new hypotheses of spiritual phenomena. We expect our readers to keep an open mind, and if any portions of the book are not to their liking, to pass them by, and confine their attention to parts which appeal to them, of which there should be no dearth in this Life.

We make no apology for inserting some rather lengthy conversations (abridged in places), for they will serve to give the reader a glimpse of the Master's wealth of thought and expression, although much of the charm of the original has of necessity been lost in the translation. For a wider knowledge of them we refer the reader to any of the collections of his teachings.

The accounts of the association of the different devotees with the Master will, we hope, be found interesting. But the amount of space given to any individual should not be taken as an index to his relative importance, for we were limited by our material, and were unable to maintain the right proportions.

Mahatma Gandhi has kindly written a Foreword in appre-

ciation of the Master, which, we dare say, will be read with interest. We have every reason to hope that the book in its present form will fill a long-felt want, and help to establish a feeling of amity among the jarring creeds and clashing interests of the modern world.

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December 20, 1924

PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

In this edition the book has been thoroughly revised. One or two inaccuracies which slipped our notice in the first edition have also been corrected. It is hoped that the book will be more acceptable to the public in its present form.

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MAYAVATI
December 15, 1928

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FOREWORD

The story of Ramakrishna Paramahansa's life is a story of religion in practice. His life enables us to see God face to face. No one can read the story of his life without being convinced that God alone is real and that all else is an illusion. Ramakrishna was a living embodiment of godliness. His sayings are not those of a mere learned man but they are pages from the Book of Life. They are revelations of his own experiences. They, therefore, leave on the reader an impression which he cannot resist. In this age of scepticism Ramakrishna presents an example of a bright and living faith which gives solace to thousands of men and women who would otherwise have remained without spiritual light. Ramakrishna's life was an object-lesson in Ahimsa.¹ His love knew no limits, geographical or otherwise. May his divine love be an inspiration to all who read the following pages.

SABARMATI,
Margsheersh, Krishna I,
Vikram Samvat 1981²

M. K. GANDHI

(12-11-1924)

ANCESTRY

In the middle of the eighteenth century there lived in the village of Derey, District of Hooghly, Bengal, a Brahmin family, of which Manikram Chattopadhyaya (familiarily known as Chatterjee) was the head. The Chatterjees were God-fearing people and observed all the Hindu religious rites with the utmost exactitude and devotion. They had lived there for several generations and were respected by the villagers for their honesty, piety and straightforwardness. Sri Ramachandra was the tutelary deity¹ of the family as indicated by the use of "Rama" in naming most of its members. The Chatterjee family lived the typical Brahmin life of olden times, never deviating from the dictates of its conscience and always ready to lend a hand of succour to the needy and distressed of the village in times of calamity. Manikram was fairly affluent, with nearly fifty acres of land at his disposal, the produce of which, together with some outside income, was sufficient to maintain his family, and enabled him to help his poorer neighbours. In course of time, probably in the year 1775, he was blessed with a son whom he called Khudiram. He it was who later became the father of the remarkable being who is the subject of this chronicle. Two other sons and a daughter were born to him, all of whom were reared according to the family traditions, the sons being educated in the village Pathshala. After the death of Manikram the care of the family fell upon the shoulders of young Khudiram.

His qualifications eminently fitted him for this task. Of a kindly nature, with a strong sense of justice, unswerving honesty, even to a point detrimental to his own interest, and intensely devotional, he proved himself equal to the trust reposed in him, not only by his father, but by the Divine Mother, who was soon to give one of Her elect into his care.

He was more than blessed in his life partner, Srimati Chandramani, or Chandra, as she was called by the family. In addition to her faith in her husband and all his judgments, no matter what reaction they might have on her own life, she had a character of great simplicity and sweetness, intense faith in

¹ Among the Brahmins some aspect or aspects of God are chosen for household worship. The image is generally installed in a room set apart and daily worship is performed at stated times. In families of other castes the services are usually conducted by the officiating priests.

and love for God and humanity. So universal was the latter that she was called the Mother of her little community. No one was ever turned away disappointed from her door ; the women of the village came to her in their trials and perplexities, knowing they would receive unselfish aid and advice.

Such were the unusual characteristics of the two who were chosen to be the custodians and guides of the early years of one of the greatest sages whose presence ever blessed this earth.

Nine years after the birth of his first son Ramakumar, Khudiram was visited in 1814 by a sudden stroke of misfortune. Ramananda Ray, the zemindar of the village, was a most tyrannical landlord, and the villagers were all afraid of him. One of them was guilty of some indiscretion, and Ramananda, to show his displeasure, entered suit on false charges and called upon Khudiram to give evidence in his (Ramananda's) favour. Khudiram not only had a horror of courts and avoided them whenever possible, but he knew as well that this was a concocted case ; if he acceded to the request, he would do violence to his conscience, perhaps for the first time in his life ; if he declined, he would incur the anger of Ramananda. After a severe struggle within himself, he decided to refuse to lend his support. Ramananda was very angry at Khudiram's audacity and decided to teach him a lesson. So he brought false charges against him too and Khudiram lost his ancestral property, including the huts which had so long sheltered him and his family.

Overwhelming as was this misfortune, he did not lose faith in the Lord Ramachandra, but bowed his head before His inscrutable dispensation. There was nothing for him to do but to leave Derey, and as his two brothers took refuge with their respective fathers-in-law, he felt free to accept the invitation of his friend Sukhlal Goswami of Kamarpukur to make his new home there. And of the once prosperous and prominent Chatterjee family of Derey there remained, after his departure, only the Shiva temple with its large tank and the affection and gratitude of the villagers.

The village of Kamarpukur is situated in the north-western promontory of the Hooghly District, adjacent to Bankura and Midnapore. The villages of Bengal fifty years ago presented quite a different aspect from that of today. Instead of desolate villages with inhabitants worn out by disease and starvation,

as may be seen since the invasion of malaria in 1867, healthy men and women passed their days in joyous affluence. Kamarpukur was no exception to the rule. The village landlords, descendants of a line of spiritual preceptors to the Maharajas of Burdwan, lived in that village, contributing, to a great extent, to its prosperity. Besides, it was situated on the road to the holy place of Puri or Jagannath. The villagers were mostly agriculturists and craftsmen. The village was famous for certain sweets and ebony pipes used in hubble-bubbles. There was also a thriving handloom industry, the products of which were sold even in the markets of Calcutta. Various religious festivals throughout the year added to the serene and innocent merriment of the village-folk. Sri Dharma,¹ the presiding deity of the village, was worshipped, specially during the Car Festival,² with great fervour. Three or four large tanks. Haldarpukur being the most noted, supplied the village with pure water. The flourishing condition of Kamarpukur is still evidenced by the debris of its old buildings and the ruins of great walls and temples. There still survives a large mango grove dedicated to public use by Manik Chandra Bannerjee. Manik was the zemindar of a neighbouring village and, because of his extensive charities, was lovingly called "Manik Raja" by the villagers.

At this time, Sukhlal Goswami, a kind-hearted and pious man, was the zemindar of Kamarpukur. The ruins of his brick-built residence and his tomb³ are still to be seen. He died about the year 1824. His son, owing to adverse circumstances, had to sell the ancestral zemindari to the Laha family of the village, to whom it still belongs. It was at the invitation of this Sukhlal that Khudiram moved to Kamarpukur. Sukhlal gave him a portion of his own house, consisting of a few huts, and settled on him nearly half an acre of very fertile land known as the "Lakshmi Jala" or "Fortune's Meadow", for maintenance.

Khudiram entered his new house with his wife, his ten-year-old son and a four-year-old daughter, in his thirty-ninth year. The unjust eviction from his ancestral home and the subsequent welcome and shelter received at Kamarpukur left

¹ Probably a remnant of degraded Buddhism.

² The festival in which the Car of Jagannath is drawn with proper ceremonies through the streets of the city or village.

³ The Goswamis are interred, according to the prevalent Vaishnava custom.

a profound and indelible impression on his mind. He was utterly disgusted with the world—its hypocrisy, malice, and greed. His love and devotion to God increased a thousandfold, and he learnt to lean upon Him more and more. The unexpected way in which he found shelter at a time when he was void of hope and nothing but ruin stared him in the face, filled his heart with calm resignation to the Divine will and a total indifference to all mundane things. He began to devote much of his time to prayer, meditation, and the worship of Sri Ramachandra. Sometimes whole days were passed in this way, for the fertile land of "Lakshmi Jala" did not make much demand on his time or energy. When the field was ready, Khudiram would transplant a few seedlings, with the words, "Glory unto Raghuvir", leaving the rest to the labourers. The crops never failed him; there was always enough, even in times of drought or flood, to supply not only the simple needs of the family, but to help beggars and strangers as well.

At this time Khudiram came strangely into possession of the emblem of his tutelary deity Raghuvir. One day, while returning home from a neighbouring village where he had gone on business, he felt tired and sat down under a tree by the side of a paddy field, fell asleep, and dreamed a wonderful dream. His beloved Ishta,¹ Sri Ramachandra, in complexion like a young blade of grass, appeared as a boy and said, "Unnoticed and uncared for, I have been starving here for many days. Take me to your home. I am eager to accept your offerings." Beside himself with joy, Khudiram replied, "My Lord, I am devoid of devotion and too poor to think of installing Thee in my hut. If I fail to show Thee proper respect, I shall suffer the agony of hell." The boy Ramachandra reassured him and said, "Do not be afraid. I shall be satisfied with your service in spite of its defects." Khudiram wept at this unsolicited mercy of the Lord and awoke from his sleep. As he looked about, he saw the place pointed out in his dream. With trembling limbs he slowly moved to the spot and to his amazement and joy found a Shalagrama or round stone emblem of Vishnu, sheltered under the hood of a venomous snake. He stretched forth his hands to take it, and snake disappeared. Calling aloud the name of Raghuvir, he clasped it to his breast.

¹ The aspect of the Lord chosen by an individual as his Ideal.

Examination showed the emblem to be of the type called Raghuvir. He took it home and regarded it as his own Ishta.

Khudiram soon attracted the notice and gained the respect of his neighbours at Kamarpukur for his intense devotion and unsullied purity. They sought his blessings, believing in their potency, and none would touch the water of the Haldarpukur when he was bathing there.¹ At this time he made an appreciable advance in spirituality. Keeping his mind on a plane of consciousness far above the world of sense pleasures, he began to have visions. Sometimes, while gathering flowers for his daily worship, he saw the goddess Shitala going before him in the form of an eight-year old girl, with a radiant smile and bedecked with various precious ornaments, as she helped him to pluck the flowers by bending the branches. At other times as he sat for meditation, tears of love trickled down his cheeks and his mind soared far away into higher regions where he found himself in close communion with his beloved Deity. Then, and when he uttered the Gayatri Mantra,² his face and chest became radiant.

The impression created by Chandra Devi in the village was equally great. Her kindness soon attracted attention. Beggars found that as long as there was a morsel of food in the house, she would share it. She was indulgent to the demands and importunities of boys and girls, and the village women came to her for help to solve their difficulties. Thus though the huts of Khudiram never smiled in affluence, they were a source of solace to many.

Sri Ramakrishna, later in life, referring to his parents, said to his disciples and devotees, "My mother was the very embodiment of rectitude and sincerity. She did not know much about the ways of the world and, being innocent of the art of concealment, would say what was in her mind. People loved her greatly for her open-heartedness. My father never accepted gifts from the Shudras.³ He spent much of his time in worship, meditation and the telling of beads. Every day, while engaged in prayer as he invoked the goddess Gayatri his chest swelled and became radiant with a divine glow and tears rolled down

¹As a mark of respect.

²A Vedic prayer to the Deity.

³The lowest of the four castes, according to the Hindu classification.

his cheeks. Again in hours of leisure, when he was not engaged in worship, he would make garlands for Raghuvir. He left his ancestral home to avoid giving false evidence. The villagers respected him as a sage."

After six years' residence in Kamarpukur, Khudiram married his son and daughter. Ramkumar attained proficiency in the Hindu code in the Tol¹ of an adjacent village, and soon was able to relieve, to a certain extent, his father's family burden. The Chatterjees had become comparatively prosperous. Ramkumar added to the income by giving opinions on disputed points of religious ceremonials or by assisting in the performance of specific rites. The story that Ramkumar had acquired supernatural powers still lives in the village. People looked upon his prophecies as infallible and related that after his initiation to the worship of the Shakti,² the Goddess bestowed on him miraculous powers in astrology, and that thenceforward he could tell whether a patient would live or die. Shivaram Chatterjee, Ramkumar's nephew, used to tell a story of his uncle's prophetic power. Ramkumar was in Calcutta on business and went to the Ganga to bathe. A rich man with his family was there also for the same purpose. In pursuance of the custom obtaining in some rich families for the strict maintenance of the purdah system, the wife was taken to the water of the Ganga in a palanquin. From that she was taking her bath. Ramkumar was standing near by and accidentally caught a glimpse of her beautiful face. With a deep sigh he remarked that the body which was being so scrupulously kept from public gaze would be consigned in the presence of all, the next morning, to this very Ganga as a lifeless corpse. The husband was greatly astonished, for his wife was young and strong. He invited Ramkumar to his home with a view to punishing him, should the prophecy prove to be false. But to the surprise and grief of all, the woman died.

On another occasion, in the case of his own wife, Ramkumar's vision was prophetic. This young woman, who was endowned with many auspicious marks,³ seemed to bring with

¹ A school of the old type where Sanskrit learning in all its branches is taught.

² The Goddess representing the Creative Energy of the universe.

³ Certain physiognomical marks which have been found by repeated observation to indicate future greatness, secular or spiritual.

her advent prosperity into the Chatterjee family and was loved by every one. But one day Ramkumar gravely told his relatives that, though everything appeared propitious, yet she would die at the birth of her first child. When she remained childless Ramkumar was relieved, but in the year 1849, at the age of thirty-five, she gave birth to a beautiful boy and expired.

With Ramkumar looking after the family, Khudiram had more time at his disposal and spent almost the whole day in meditation, worship, and religious discourses. He found that the only harbour of refuge in a distracted world was in continuous devotion to God. There arose in him the desire to go on pilgrimage, for did not the scriptures teach that God revealed Himself most in holy places frequented by devotees and sanctified from time immemorial by the presence of sages and anchorites?

It was probably in the year 1824 that Khudiram started on his long pilgrimage to Rameswaram in South India, a place highly venerated by the Hindus. It is associated with the sacred memory of Sri Ramachandra, who, on his return from Lanka, worshipped the God Shiva there. Khudiram travelled the whole distance of nearly fifteen hundred miles on foot, visiting various holy places on the way. This pilgrimage lasted about a year. Twelve months later, in 1826, his wife Chandra became the mother of a second son, who was named Rameshwar.

About nine years later Khudiram felt a strong inclination to go on another pilgrimage—this time to Gaya. Though advanced in years, he wished, according to the time-honoured custom of the Hindus, to redeem the souls of his departed ancestors by the reverential offering of Pinda, the oblation of barley balls, at the holy footprint of Lord Vishnu there.¹ In spite of his years, the journey of nearly two hundred miles on foot had no terrors for him. Khudiram started for Gaya early in the year 1835 and arrived there in the month of March.²

¹ Acts of service done in memory of departed relatives. While these are meant to satisfy the departed, the attitude of mind of the one performing such acts is the more important.

² Some are of opinion that Khudiram had already visited the holy cities of Vrindaban, Ayodhya, and Banaras, while at Derey, and named his first son and daughter—who were born not long after this event—Ramkumar and Katyayani, in memory of this pilgrimage. According to this version, he visited only Gaya this time. But others say that he visited first Banaras and then Gaya. No details of this visit to Banaras are available.

2

BIRTH

Khudiram stayed about a month at Gaya, performing various ceremonies according to the scriptures. He went to the shrine of Vishnu, or Gadadhar, as He is called, and offered oblations to his departed forefathers. The joy which he felt on that day can better be imagined than described, for he had discharged one of his obligations as a son according to the scriptures. He felt that the spirits of his ancestors were blessing him. Full of humility and gratitude he thanked God again and again for giving him the opportunity of fulfilling his obligation. That night he had strange dream. He felt himself transported again to the temple of Gadadhar where in the solemn silence of the sacred precincts, he found his forefathers feasting with gladdened hearts on the oblations. Suddenly a divine effulgence filled the room, and the spirits of the departed fell reverently on their knees before a luminous Person seated on a throne. The effulgent One beckoned to Khudiram, who came forward and, with a heart full of devotion, prostrated himself. Addressing Khudiram in a tone of great sweetness, He said, "I am well pleased at your sincere devotion. I am born again and again to chastise the wicked and protect the virtuous. This time I shall be born in your cottage and accept you as My father." Khudiram was struck dumb with awe; when he regained the power of speech he said, "No, my Lord, I am not fit for this favour. Thou hast already shown me more than I deserve. I am too poor to serve Thee properly." The Lord consoled and reassured him. Khudiram awoke, his heart thrilled with joy. He understood that a divine being would bless his home, but he resolved to say nothing of his experience. He returned home about the end of April.

In the meantime, Chandra Devi was also having strange visions. One night she dreamed that a luminous person exactly resembling her husband was at her side. The vision persisted even after she awoke. She thought that someone must have broken into her room, and that the sound of footsteps had caused the dream. She arose, lit the lamp, but found the door bolted on the inside. She became so nervous that she was unable to

sleep the rest of the night. Next morning she called two of her friends, Prasanna, the daughter of Dharmadas Laha, and Dhani, her blacksmith neighbour, and told them what had happened. They laughed at her, told her not to repeat the absurd story, and assured her that it was nothing but a dream.

Another day when she was standing with Dhani before the Shiva temple adjacent to her house, she saw a flood of celestial light issue from the image of Lord Shiva and dart towards her. She was about to speak of the phenomenon to her friend, when the light entered her body and completely overpowered her, rendering her unconscious. Dhani nursed her back to consciousness and, hearing the whole story, was at first puzzled and then took it as a nervous disease. But Chandra felt as if she were with child.

The first thing that struck Khudiram after his return was the change in his wife. Her natural kindness of heart was increased to such a degree that it overflowed in every direction. More than ever she considered it her duty to help her neighbours in every possible way, supplying their needs from her own stores, even going without food, if necessary. And when she told Khudiram of her experience and that she felt that she was about to become a mother, he remembered his own visions at Gaya and was able to reassure her by telling her that they were going to be blessed with a divine child and that supernatural happenings were to be looked for in such a case. He advised her not to speak of her visions to any one. Chandra was greatly consoled and passed her days in complete resignation to the will of Raghuvir.

The present living members of the Chatterjee family relate that the prospective mother began to have visions almost daily. Sometimes she felt the presence of celestial beings; at other times she heard voices. One day she awoke from sleep to hear the tinkling of bells from a child's anklets. Sometimes she was found speaking in whispers with invisible beings. She told of her strange experiences to her husband, saying that she had them not during prayer or meditation, but with her eyes wide open.

We make no attempt to explain the strange incidents narrated above. We shall only remind the reader that similar stories are associated with the advent of Prophets and Incarnations all over the world. The incidents here related are not

based on mere hearsay, but, as far as possible, have been gathered from authentic sources.

The blessed hour for which Khudiram and Chandra were anxiously waiting at last drew near. On the morning of February 17th, in the year 1836, Chandra told her husband that the time of her delivery was at hand, but the following night was wellnigh passed before, with the help of Dhani, she gave birth to a boy. The lying-in room where the august stranger was born was a small hut containing a husking machine and an oven for boiling paddy. It was the vernal season and nature had breathed new life into the world after the long winter. Birds with their sweet chirpings and flowers with delicious perfume heralded the advent of the new prophet, who with infinite love in one hand and infinite knowledge in the other came to deliver his message of hope to suffering humanity.

After giving the necessary assistance to the mother, Dhani turned her attention to the babe, which, to her surprise, was not where she had placed it. It had slipped into the adjacent oven, and was lying there half-covered with ashes, without uttering a cry! She picked up the infant and was astonished to find that it was as large as a child six months old. When the friends heard the glad tidings, there was great rejoicing, and blasts of conch-shells announced the blessed event to the outside world. Khudiram, an adept in astrology,¹ found that the infant was born at a most auspicious moment, giving promise of a brilliant future. Celebrated astrologers later corroborated this and prophesied a great and illustrious career for it.

Khudiram was overjoyed that the prospective greatness of his son confirmed his vision at Gaya and explained the experiences of Chandra Devi. He named him Gadādhara because of his wonderful experience at Gaya.

¹ From ancient times in India it has been the custom to cast the horoscope of every new-born child. Through it the future could be foretold with tolerable accuracy.

From his very birth Gadadhar had a strange fascination not only for his parents and near relatives, but also for his neighbours who came to the cottage of Khudiram whenever possible.

The pecuniary condition of the family improved appreciably, Ramkumar's fame as an expert in the performance of all religious rites and ceremonies was spreading far and wide, bringing a fair income to the poor family in its hour of need. Besides, as soon as the happy news of the birth of Gadadhar was sent to Ranchand, Khudiram's nephew, he anticipated the needs of the family and presented it with a cow, in addition to his regular help of fifteen rupees a month.

Six months passed, and the time came for the celebration of the ceremony of the first rice-taking. At first Khudiram thought it prudent to perform it in a humble way, in the presence of a few relatives. But under the secret instructions of his friend Dharmadas Laha, the Brahmin of the village requested Khudiram to celebrate it with pomp. Khudiram had not the means to manage the festival on such a big scale, but he had to give way to their importunities. He consulted his friend Dharmadas, who cheerfully bore the greater part of the expenses, and the ceremony was performed in a befitting manner. A large number of beggars were fed, and they all blessed the boy.

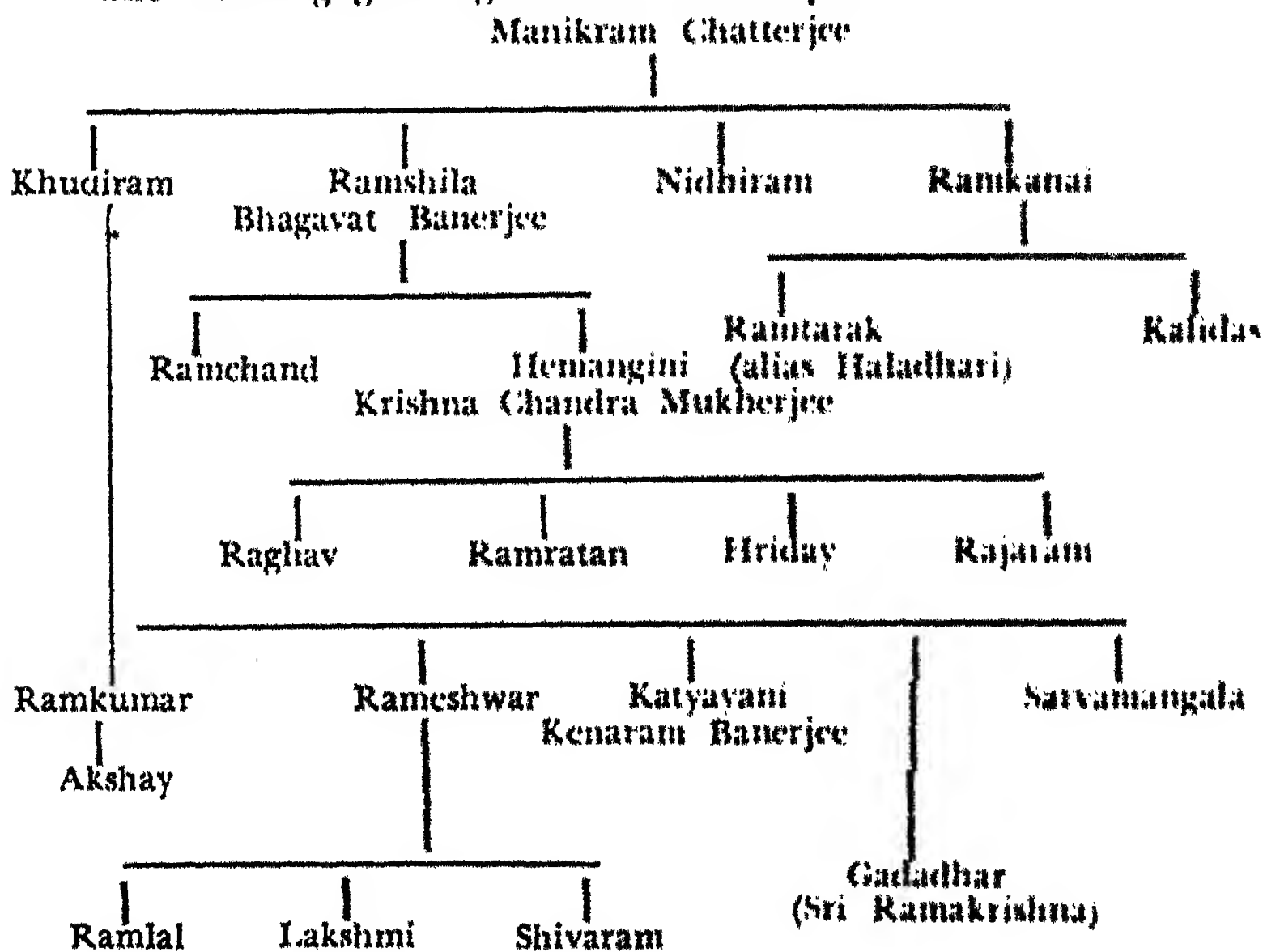
Meanwhile, from the birth of the boy, various supernatural phenomena took place which filled Chandra with alarm. Though at times she was sure that a great soul had deigned to be born as her son, yet her mother's heart was troubled by apprehensions of some future trouble to Gadadhar through the evil influence of spirits or ghosts, which was her way of explaining these extraordinary happenings. Sometimes the child seemed too heavy to carry, and she had to call to her husband for help. A moment later Gadadhar would be light as ever. As happenings of this sort became rather frequent, poor Chandra became very uneasy.

¹ Supernatural - from the standpoint of inexplicableness and ignorance of the laws of the subtle planes.

But Khudiram consoled her by saying that such incidents were not strange in the case of a divine child. Besides, their tutelary deity Raghuvir would always give protection. This, however, did not pacify the mother, and she fervently prayed to the gods for her son's welfare.

Three years rolled on, and in 1839 a daughter named Sarvamangala was added to the family.¹ Gadadhar was now five years old. He was a healthy boy, of exquisite grace. Khudiram was greatly surprised at his wonderful intelligence and memory even at this early age. The precocious boy learnt by heart the names of his ancestors, the hymns to various gods and goddesses, and tales from the great national epics. One hearing was enough; even after a great lapse of time he could repeat them. Young as he was, he showed great distaste for certain things, such as the rudiments of mathematics. He was an extremely restless boy; and, thinking that school might help him to control this, Khudiram sent him to the village school, where he was soon loved by both students and teacher. The classes were held in a spacious bungalow belonging to the Laha family, which on festive occasions was used for dramatic performances. There were morning and afternoon sessions.

¹ The following genealogical table will help the reader:



Khudiram's peculiar experiences before Gadadhar's birth had convinced him of the future greatness of his boy. From the very beginning he viewed him as different; the faults inexcusable in ordinary boys were overlooked in his case, and his spirit of waywardness was condoned. But there was a gulf of difference between the childish pranks of Gadadhar and those of other boys. Generally, when boys are detected in some mischief, they try to excuse themselves and refrain from repetition only through fear of punishment. Gadadhar was different. He freely confessed when caught, but nothing could intimidate him to the point that he would refrain from doing it again, did he so desire. Gentle and affectionate persuasions, however, always had their effects upon him and made him yield, and his sweet nature always prevented him from injuring any one.

At school Gadadhar made fair progress. He was able to read and write, but his aversion to mathematics continued as before. In those days minstrels used to go through the villages reciting mythological stories from the epics and Puranas; and the villagers, without any stage-setting, would enact them. Gadadhar never missed any of these performances and listened with rapt attention, noticing carefully the pose of the actors. Often he repeated such dramas before his friends almost verbatim—such was his wonderful memory. He learnt from the potters the art of moulding images of gods and goddesses and then made excellent ones at home. From the painters he learnt to paint them. This was his favourite pastime.

Thus instead of turning his attention to the acquirement of that learning for which he was sent to school, so that later he might earn his livelihood, Gadadhar directed all his energies to the study of the lives and characters of spiritual heroes. Constant study of those subjects often made him forgetful of the world and threw him into deep meditations. As he grew older, these turned into frequent trances whenever his religious feelings were aroused. Besides the great epics, he was interested in the folk-lore of his own and surrounding villages. Often he would make copies of some of the interesting incidents from books or manuscripts: some of these may still be seen at the Belur Math.

As he grew older, other traits of character began to manifest themselves. For example, he showed wonderful courage. The

places that other people shunned as being haunted, he visited without any year. Almost all the members of the Chatterjee family were open to psychic influences. This helped them into deep meditations, making them lose their identity completely in the thought of the Chosen Ideal. This often happened to Ramshila, Khudiram's sister, when she meditated on the goddess Shitala. At such times she was looked upon with respect and awe. Once when Ramshila was in such a mood, Gadadhar was standing by. Instead of being afraid at what he saw, he said afterwards with a smile, "It would be great fun if she who possessed my aunt got hold of me!"

But the chief characteristic of the boy, to which we have already referred, was his influence over everyone coming in contact with him. The boys with whom he used to play could not bear to be separated from him, and the villagers who had once seen him came again and again to Khudiram's house with sweets or fruits as an excuse to see him. This unusual power of attraction he retained throughout his life.

Manikram, a great friend of Khudiram, often invited the latter to his house. Once when Gadadhar was six years old, he accompanied his father. Manikram said, "Well, I don't think Gadadhar is an ordinary child. He has unusual marks on his body. His presence really gladdens my heart, and I wish you would often bring him with you." After that, if Khudiram were unable to go to see Manik, the latter would send for Gadadhar. The boy would spend the entire day with him, returning in the evening laden with presents.

We have already referred to the strong influence of religious books on the susceptible mind of Gadadhar. Whenever he read such books to the villagers, he did so with such feeling that for the time being he seemed to lose his own identity, and the audience would be spellbound. His relatives could not understand this and ascribed it to hysteria. Soon it was found that not only books, but beautiful scenery or some touching incident was sufficient to make him lose himself. And the village abounded in such stimuli. Nature's beauties and sublimities could be seen there in their primitive glory. One day an occurrence of this kind caused great anxiety to his parents and relatives. Sri Ramakrishna in later years narrated

this incident to his devotees in his usual poetic way. We give here the substance of what he said:

"In that part of the country (meaning Kamarpukur) the boys are given puffed rice for luncheon. This they carry in small wicker baskets, or, if they are too poor, in a corner of their cloth. Then they go out for play on the roads or in the fields. One day, in June or July, when I was six or seven years old, I was walking along a narrow path separating the paddy fields, eating some of the puffed rice which I was carrying in a basket. Looking up at the sky I saw a beautiful sombre thunder-cloud. As it spread rapidly enveloping the whole sky, a flight of snow-white cranes flew overhead in front of it. It presented such a beautiful contrast that my mind wandered to far off regions. Lost to outward sense, I fell down, and the puffed rice was scattered in all directions. Some people found me in that plight and carried me home in their arms. That was the first time I completely lost consciousness in ecstasy."

Though he seemed quite well when he regained consciousness, his parents were greatly frightened. Khudiram thought it wise to take precautions against a recurrence of this episode, lest it should do the boy bodily harm at his tender age. But Gadadhar reassured him by telling him that he had simply lost all outward consciousness as his mind was overpowered by an inexpressible emotion and unspeakable joy. However his parents kept him from school for several days.

BOYHOOD

When Gadadhar was seven years old, the simple, quiet life of the Chatterjee family was suddenly interrupted by a sad event fraught with great consequences to Gadadhar. In the year 1843 Khudiram developed symptoms of indigestion, which soon turned into chronic dysentery. His strong body became emaciated, and in his sixty-eighth year he had not vitality enough to check the growth of the disease. The autumn season arrived. Every year Khudiram's nephew, Ramchand, celebrated with great pomp the Durga Puja festival at his home at Salampore. Khudiram usually attended. This year, apprehensive of the dark shadow looming in the future, he hesitated about going. But on second thoughts, he changed his mind, and set out with his eldest son, Ramkumar. A few days after his arrival at Salampore his illness took a serious turn, and on the fourth day of the celebration he became unconscious. Ramchand was greatly concerned. Realizing that Khudiram's last moment had come, he called to him the name of Raghuvir. At the mention of this holy name Khudiram suddenly became conscious and asked to be helped up to a sitting posture on the bed. He then uttered the name of Raghuvir thrice and expired. Ramchand and his family were overpowered with grief at the death of Khudiram. His body was taken to the bank of the adjacent river and the last rites were performed according to the usual custom.

The sad tidings reached Kamarpukur and cast an unspeakable gloom over the Chatterjee family. To a Hindu wife the death of her husband, who is her visible God on earth, is considered the greatest misfortune. Chandra Devi was now virtually dead to the world. Laying aside all the enjoyments of life—of which indeed she had very few—she concentrated her whole energy on prayer and meditation, and looked eagerly to the day when she would be united with her beloved in the other world.

This event unnerved Ramkumar as well, upon whose shoulders now fell the entire responsibility of the family. He had to look after his widowed mother, educate the younger brothers and manage the domestic affairs in keeping with the

traditions of the family. The death of Khudiram brought a great change in the mind of Gadadhar also. Every day he felt the loss of his father more and more. The striking contrast between his father's character and that of other people began to dawn on him. His naturally thoughtful mind became graver, though to the observer he still retained his usual air of youthful merriment. No one observed that the boy began to frequent the mango grove or the cremation ground in the vicinity alone and pass long hours there absorbed in thought, nor that his attention was focussed more than ever on Puranic recitals and the making of clay images of gods and goddesses.

Besides, there was a marked change in Gadadhar's behaviour towards his mother. Finding that she desired great solace from his company, he spent some time every day in helping her in her household work or in the worship of Raghuvir. He also became less exacting in his importunities, knowing she would be grieved if she could not supply his childish demands. He thought it his duty to lessen the burden of his mother's grief and to infuse into her melancholy life whatever joy and consolation he could.

The village of Kamarpukur, as stated before, was situated on the road leading to Puri, and in those days when there were few railroads, this route was much frequented by pilgrims, wandering monks, and others, mostly all on foot. The Laha family built a rest house for these wayfarers. Gadadhar soon found a new source of pleasure in the company of the Sadhus; he delighted in their stories of various saints and different places, and prayers and songs. He knew already of their unconventional life, their indifference to bodily pain or pleasure, their devotion and resignation to God, and their contentment with whatever food came to them. The boy was beginning to be conscious of the transitoriness of the world. Contact with the monks strengthened this feeling. He delighted in spending hour after hour with them, listening to their religious discussions, learning songs from them, joining in their prayers, and sometimes even partaking of their meals and assisting them by fetching water or collecting fuel. They took a great fancy to him. Chandra Devi did not object. She rather rejoiced at this association of her son with the Sadhus and thought that their benedictions would be beneficial. But one day she was startled when the

boy came to her with his body smeared with ashes. He had torn his cloth into two and wrapped both pieces round his loins like Kaupins.¹ "Look, mother", he said with a smile, "I have become a Sadhu." The mother was anxious, for she had heard of pretended monks who in the guise of ascetics tempted boys and kidnapped them. She asked Gadadhar to shun their company. The boy, failing to convince his mother of the utter baselessness of her apprehensions, at last agreed to obey her and went to the Sadhus to bid them farewell. They were surprised and pained to hear of the mother's fears and went to her house to assure her of the safety of her boy.

Association with these itinerant monks and listening to their readings from the scriptures inclined the naturally emotional mind of the boy more and more to meditation. So we find him in his boyhood, long before he passed through the terrible asceticism in the Kali temple of Dakshineswar, giving evidence of the transcendental nature of his mind—its difference from the ordinary one. The following incident furnishes an instance of his deep religious bent.

The goddess Vishalakshi, the presiding deity of Anur, a village close to Kamarpukur, was held in great veneration by the people of the neighbouring villages as well, who often went there to redeem their vows on the fulfilment of their particular desires. She was reputed to be a particular patron of the poor and outcast as well as of the cowherd boys. One day a party of women, amongst them Prasanna, the daughter of Dharmadas Laha, who was noted for her piety and great devotion, was on its way to Anur to worship Vishalakshi. Gadadhar insisted on accompanying them. Accordingly, he set out with them. As the party walked along, Gadadhar relieved the tedium of the journey with songs in praise of the goddess. Suddenly, he was overcome with religious emotion—his body became still and motionless, tears rolled down his cheeks, and he made no response to the women when they called aloud to him in their fright. Not being familiar with the trance state, they thought he must have had a sunstroke. Some splashed water on his face, others fanned him, but with no results. Finally, Prasanna in desperation called upon the goddess for help. The name of Vishalakshi had been repeated only a few times when the boy

¹ Sadhus' loin-cloth.

showed signs of returning consciousness, and presently he was himself again, with no evidence of any harm having come to him.

Gadadhar was now nine ; and it was time to invest him with the holy thread. This is the first memorable occasion in the life of a Brahmin ; in fact the scriptures consider him as a Shudra, a man belonging to the lowest caste, until this has been done. Then he becomes a true Brahmin and is permitted to utter the holy Mantras, and to worship the gods and goddesses ; he is supposed to enter a new life—a life of purity, sacrifice, truthfulness and great restraint—and is, therefore, called a Dwija or "twice born". Besides observing great restrictions in food and other enjoyments, the scriptures enjoin on him the strictest discipline in all phases of life, and condign is the punishment for any breach. Every Brahmin boy looks forward to this sacred ceremony ; Gadadhar was no exception.

A curious incident happened in this connection. After the investiture with the holy thread, it is the general practice with the newly initiated to take his first Bhiksha or alms from some relative, or person of equal rank. But it so happened that Dhani, the blacksmith woman of the village, had long ago prayed to Gadadhar to allow her the privilege of giving him the first Bhiksha, and the boy, moved by her genuine love, had agreed. Dhani waited with an expectant heart. After the ceremony was over Gadadhar told of his promise to his brother Ramkumar. Objections were raised on the ground that it was contrary to the custom of the family. But Gadadhar insisted on keeping his promise. The family was forced to give way ; and so it was from Dhani that Gadadhar took his first alms.

Reading this incident in the light of subsequent events, many ideas arise in the mind. First of all, it shows Gadadhar's great, undeviating love for truth. He had given his promise, and he was ready to keep it at whatever cost. At the same time it does not explain why he gave a promise which might bring social stigma on his family. Could it have been Dhani's sincere devotion that prompted him to do so ? May it not be that, even at that tender age, Sri Ramakrishna's every act had its meaning, and that his unerring intuition empowered him to recognise religious sincerity and to prefer it to social regulations, which, necessary as they are under ordinary circumstances,

must be set aside if the spirit of the law, instead of the letter, is to be honoured ?

So far, it was only the villagers who knew the great qualities of Gadadhar, although none had any idea of the great part that he was to play later. Shortly after the thread ceremony, an incident occurred bringing him for the first time before them as a teacher. He was then about ten years old. There was a great Shraddha ceremony in the house of Dharmadas Laha, to which a number of Brahmin scholars were invited. As generally happens on such occasions, the scholars were engaged in an animated debate over some subtle point. The argument lasted for hours. Their excited gestures and loud voices during the wordy warfare attracted a number of spectators, amongst whom was Gadadhar. While the other boys were chatting or imitating the gestures of the Pundits, he was listening with rapt attention. Finally, the boy whispered something to a Brahmin, asking if that might not be the answer. When the others heard it they accepted it at once as the only possible solution. Coming as it did from a boy of scarcely ten, they were amazed at such mental maturity in one so young.

Similar incidents are by no means uncommon in the lives of great ones such as Sri Krishna, Shankara, Sri Chaitanya, Christ, and others, who evidenced extraordinary powers at a very early age. It is said that before he was eight, the great Shankara had mastered the Hindu scriptures ; at sixteen he composed the masterpieces on Vedanta which take the man of ordinary intelligence a whole lifetime to read and digest. Sri Chaitanya, too, showed astonishing intelligence and memory when he was quite a boy. And we can cite a parallel instance from the life of Christ, who, in his twelfth year, confounded the learned Rabbis of Jerusalem with his wisdom—fully conscious at the time of what he was doing, as his answers to his parents clearly demonstrate. All this shows that by their very constitution they must have access to hidden reservoirs of knowledge and wisdom, not dreamed of by ordinary men and women. And in judging their actions we must show a spirit of humility and rid our minds of all preconceived ideas.

After his investiture with the sacred thread, Gadadhar was permitted to worship the family god Raghuvir. This filled him with great joy. He was aware of his father's great devotion

to Him. So when he sat down to worship Him, he thought of Him not as a stone emblem, but as God incarnate—the Creator, Preserver, and Destroyer of the world. The hours he passed in worship and meditation raised his mind to a very high level, where he often had remarkable visions.

On a Shivaratri night, arrangements were made for a dramatic performance in the village, at the house of Sitamath Pyne, the theme chosen being a chapter from the life of Shiva. It is customary on such occasions for the devotees of Shiva to fast the whole day and keep vigil by prayer, worship, and songs in His praise. Four services are held in the four watches of the night. Young Gadadhar also fasted that day and resolved to pass the night at home in worshipping the Lord. The first watch was over, when Gayavishnu and some other friends came to him and said that his presence was needed at once at the house of Sitamath Pyne, because the man who was to play the principal part, the role of Shiva, had fallen ill, at the eleventh hour, and they must have a substitute, and Gadadhar had been selected. Gadadhar at first declined, saying he could not leave his worship; but his friends pointed out that there in playing the part he would have to think constantly of the Lord Shiva, and that that too was worship. So Gadadhar was prevailed upon to go and was taken to the green-room. While his friends were dressing him for the role of Shiva—smearing his body with ashes, matting his locks, and hanging Rudraksha beads and other accessories of the costume on him—his mind soared far from the consciousness of the world. When the time came for him to appear, he went on the stage with slow and measured steps and supported by his friends. His countenance was grave; and as he stood before the spectators he seemed the living impersonation of Shiva. The enthusiasm of the audience was unbounded. In the meantime the boy had completely lost himself in the divine glory of Shiva; his mind in its transcendental flight was transported into a region of calmness and serenity as immutable as the Lord Shiva Himself. The different phases of the great glory of Mahadeva, the God of gods, were revealed to him. Calm, sweet, self-forgetful, and oblivious of the pains and pleasures of the world, the great God appeared before him as the ideal of serene contemplativeness, immersed in Samadhi. There the boy stood, lost in the great sublimity

of Shiva, dead to the surrounding world. The manager of the performance with one or two elderly men of the village approached him and found that he was unconscious. He would have been taken for dead but for the stream of tears flowing from his eyes and the radiance of his countenance. The effect of this scene upon all pious hearts among the audience was tremendous. Finally his friends became alarmed and tried to restore him to consciousness, but in vain. The performance had to stop. He was taken home in that condition and did not recover outward consciousness till the next morning.

Such trances became rather frequent thereafter. While meditating or listening to a devotional song, his mind would be withdrawn from outside objects and remain long in a state of absorption. When questioned about this, the boy said that meditation on any deity brought the real form before his mind, and the emotions evoked thereby caused him to lose outward consciousness. His mother and relatives were at first much concerned at these trances, but the boy's unimpaired health and bodily vigour gradually set their minds at ease. Though he was often thus overpowered, there was no interference with his daily routine. He took great delight in all the religious ceremonies of the village, deriving equal pleasure from the worship of all forms of deity without distinction. This impartial love enabled him in the long run to realize that the same divinity was behind all images and religions.

Those few fortunate souls of Kamarpukur who were able to discern the greatness of Gadadhar actually worshipped him. One of these was Shrinivas, a low-caste Hindu whose family lived by making shell bracelets. The Master often spoke highly of this man's great piety and spirituality. He loved Gadadhar and took delight in his company, often holding animated discussions with him on the *Bhagavata*. One day, as he was making a garland for worship, Gadadhar came. Shrinivas at once brought some sweetmeats from the market and concealing them in his cloth, conducted Gadadhar to a secluded spot under a tree in the maidan. Looking about to be sure that he was not observed, he worshipped Gadadhar, hanging the garland on him and feeding him with the sweets. With eyes bathed in tears and a voice choked with feeling, he said, "I have become old and feel my end approaching. I shall not have the good luck

to see the many wonderful things that you will do in the world. I only pray that you will ever look with compassion upon this unworthy servant of yours."

We have spoken of the association of Gadadhar with the other boys of his village. They passed a great portion of the day together in play, often absenting themselves from school. Their favourite retreat was the mango orchard which has been dedicated by Manik Raja to the use of the public. They assembled there under a big tree to partake of the fried rice they brought from home. Gadadhar selected a number of young boys who could sing and formed a sort of dramatic company. The themes of their performances were episodes from the *Ramayana* or the *Mahabharata*, which they heard often at the amateur village plays, which Gadadhar, owing to his retentive memory, could reproduce almost verbatim. He selected the part for every actor, himself taking the part of the hero of course. Gadadhar's favourite themes were the various incidents in the life of Sri Krishna, specially the *Vrajalila*, or the youthful sports of Sri Krishna with the cowherds and milkmaids of Vrindaban. The height of dramatic effect was reached when he sang the pastoral songs depicting the great exploits of Sri Krishna, or the pangs of Sri Radha at her separation from her beloved lover, while the other boys acted as Subal, Shridam, and other companions of Krishna. Young Gadadhar, with his fair complexion and flowing hair, a garland about his neck and a flute at his lips, would take the part of Sri Krishna; or as Radhika depict grief at separation from Krishna. Gadadhar, overwhelmed with the emotion associated with these themes, would fall into frequent trances. At times the whole mango grove would re-echo with the *Sankirtanas* which the boys sang in chorus. Soon the teacher learned that the boys absented themselves from school in order to spend their time in song and merry-making. One day he summoned them before him and asked them who was their ringleader. Gadadhar was pointed out, and the teacher asked him to repeat what he did in the mango garden with his friends. Boldly the boy sang a song, which so charmed the teacher that he forgot to punish them. Of these boys, the most intimate friend of Gadadhar was Gayavishnu. Gadadhar never forgot to share the sweets or fruits, presented by the village women, with him.

As he grew older, Gadadhar's distaste for the routine work of the school increased, though he loved to read the epics, Puranas and other sacred books. There he would find a response to the great spiritual fervour in his heart. Sometimes he read aloud the lives of Prahlada, Dhruva, or other great devotees to the villagers. The more his attention was turned in this direction, the more he neglected his studies. Because of his frequent trances, his eldest brother thought it wise to allow him freedom, so that he might not feel the strain of any sustained work.

Meanwhile the monotony in the life of the Chatterjee family was broken by various incidents, one of which at least greatly influenced the future career of Gadadhar. Rameshwar and Sarvamangala, who were now grown up, were married. The wife of Ramkumar was soon to be a mother, but this instead of causing any joy filled the family with apprehensions of coming danger. Her actions were very strange. She broke the traditional rule of the family of abstaining from food before the worship of Raghuvir; when taken to task by her husband or mother-in-law, she was resentful. In the year 1849 she gave birth to a male child, who was named Akshay, and expired soon after, thus fulfilling the prophecy of Ramkumar. From this time there set in an adverse tide in the pecuniary condition of the family. Rameshwar, though an expert in the Smriti and other subjects, could barely earn a decent living. Ramkumar's income was also unexpectedly diminished, and he was too old to find new ways of increasing it. He had scarcely recovered from the great shock of losing his dear wife, the loving companion of thirty years, when he was called upon to face financial difficulties. Forced into debt which he had no way of paying, he resolved to go elsewhere, to some place where he might turn his qualifications to a better account. Upon the advice of friends he decided to go to Calcutta and open a *Tol* at Jhamapukur, in the central part of the city.

The burden of the family now fell on Rameshwar. Young and inexperienced as he was, he tried to accommodate himself to his new situation. He had to look after an aged mother, a younger brother, and his own wife, as well as the motherless boy of Ramkumar. Gadadhar's aversion for education filled Rameshwar with great concern for his future. But he inherited Khudiram's precious trait of looking to God in everything and

resting satisfied with what was ordained by the Divine will. So though at times his spirits drooped, at others he forgot everything in the company of the pilgrims and ascetics in the rest-house of the Laha family. He knew that "God hammered so fiercely at His world, trampled and kneaded it like dough, cast it so often into the blood-bath and the red hell-heat of the furnace," because human nature was "still a hard, crude and vile ore which would not otherwise be smelted and shaped." And somehow he managed to support the family.

The death of Ramakumar's wife threw Chandra Devi into a sorry predicament. When her daughter-in-law was the housewife, Chandra Devi was to a great extent free from the concerns of the family and spent her time mostly in prayer. Now at the age of fifty-eight, she was hurled back into the world. Besides taking care of Akshay, she had to help in the cooking, the worship of Raghuvir, and other domestic affairs. In the grip of old age and infirmity, she must again pick up courage, leave her rosary aside, and give herself to the service of the family.

ON THE THRESHOLD OF YOUTH

These changes in the Chatterjee family left an indelible impression on the emotional mind of Gadadhar. The death of his brother's wife, the unkindness of fortune, the diminishing income—all these strengthened his conviction as to the fleeting nature of worldly enjoyments. Even at that tender age he was disgusted with the world. His dislike for academic education increased. He found that men ran after worldly knowledge because it would help them to earn money or to gain prestige—the transitory nature of which was but too evident to him. He resolved to pass a life of meditation, prayer, and worship; and though he still performed the routine work of the day, the chief item of which was helping his aged mother in her household duties, he spent a great portion of his time in worshipping Raghuvir or in reading passages from the holy books.

We have already said that the neighbouring women were greatly attracted by Gadadhar's amiable character. After the departure of Ramkumar for Calcutta, the boy, owing to the nature of the duties he took upon himself, had to spend much time indoors, which afforded them greater opportunities of enjoying his company. They thronged Chandra's house after the day's work and grouped themselves about the boy, hoping to hear him sing or recite some holy text. So persistent were they that presently those things became part of his daily duty. In those days Bauls¹ and many Vaishnavas lived at Kamarpukur. Gadadhar learnt their devotional songs by heart and would entertain his mother's visitors by singing them as well as enacting some of the village dramas, he himself taking the different parts. He had a wonderful knack of imitating voices, especially woman's, and was a good mimic as well. When he found his mother or any of her friends in low spirits, he would cheer them up with his impersonations. There could be no trace of melancholy in the presence of this sprightly, ingenuous boy.

The companionship soon deepened into intimacy. The ladies knew of the extraordinary circumstances attending the birth of Gadadhar and were aware of his great spiritual fervour

¹ A sect of wandering religious singers.

and unflinching devotion. His simplicity, uprightness, piety and unbounded faith in the gods charmed their heart. Aged women like Prasannamayī regarded him as the boy Gopala. Younger ones thought he was endowed with some of the characteristics of Sri Krishna. His great naturalness and perfect adaptability made them forget his sex, and they had no hesitation in confiding their secrets to him. His nature at this time became amazingly feminine, doubtless due to his study of the folk dramas and lyrics of the Vaishnavas, which deal mostly with the life of Sri Krishna and his relations with the cowherd boys and the milkmaids of Vrindaban.

The pathos underlying the attraction felt by the Gopis for their beloved cowherd Friend, the intensity of that love which, as it were, consumed them bit by bit, the pangs of separation, the supreme felicity at the reunion, and lastly, the great idealism at the back of these episodes made a lasting impression upon the mind of Gadadhar. Often in his yearning for God he would transmute himself, so to speak, into a milkmaid of Vrindaban, forgetting his real self. The pious young women of the village, who were mostly devotees of Vishnu, reminded him of the Gopis of Vrindaban, and, therefore, he sought their company. He knew that the Gopis were able to realize Krishna as their husband and feel the bliss of his eternal reunion, because they were women. He in his eagerness for the same goal would regret that he was born a man and was inclined to think that his masculine form was a great barrier separating him from his Beloved. If he were to be born again, he would like to be a child widow in a pious Brahmin family, who would only think of Krishna as her husband. With barely enough to maintain herself, she would have a milch cow, a spinning wheel and a plot of land about her hut to grow vegetables. An old woman would act as her guardian. She would prepare various sweets from the milk of her cow and preserve them for her Beloved. After finishing the day's work she would sit by the wheel and while spinning, give vent to her feelings in a rapturous song. Then in the mellowed light of the evening Sri Krishna would enter the hut stealthily as the cowherd boy and take those sweets. Thus would his fancy wander.

This ideal of Gadadhar was not literally fulfilled; but he realized Sri Krishna in this very life in the form he wished, as

we shall see afterwards. While enacting female parts, he would dress himself accordingly, and his representation was perfect. Often out of fun he would go in the guise of a girl to the Haldarpukur, carrying a waterjug after the fashion of the country women, and though he walked with people who had known him since birth, they scarcely recognized him. Sitanath Pyne, whose house was close to Khudiram's had seven sons, and eight daughters with him at Kamarpukur, even after their marriage. This family lived in terms of great intimacy with Chandra. Gadadhar spent long hours there reciting stories from the Puranas. Many of the village women visiting, with the ladies of the house, had the opportunity of hearing these recitations and of enjoying Gadadhar's boyish pranks.

A neighbour of Sitanath's, named Durgadas Pyne, was a strict advocate of the purdah system. He boasted that no male outsider had ever penetrated his women's quarters. One day Gadadhar overheard him and told him that by education and devotion to God alone could the chastity of women be preserved, not by confining them within a zenana. "Besides", he added, "I can easily gain access to yours." Durgadas challenged the boy to do it. "All right, we shall see" he replied and went away smiling.

One evening Durgadas was chatting with a number of friends, when a poorly dressed woman, her face hidden under a veil and with a basket on her arm, came and stood before them. She introduced herself by saying that she belonged to a weaver family of an adjacent village and had come to the market to sell yarn. Her friends had all gone home leaving her behind, and as it was impossible for her to return alone at that hour, she prayed that she might be allowed to pass the night in his family. Durgadas asked the woman a few questions and then said, "All right; go inside and speak to the ladies." The woman expressed her gratitude and went inside. The women, finding her young and of great simplicity, invited her to stay the night and gave her something to eat. She seated herself near by, and while partaking of the refreshments, scrutinized every room in the house, joining, now and then, in the conversation. Some three hours passed in this way. In the meantime, Chandra missed Gadadhar; when some hours elapsed and he was still absent, she became very anxious and sent Rameshwar

in search of him. Rameshwar went first to Sitanath's house, for it was there that the boy spent most of his time. But he was not there. He sought him elsewhere calling his name aloud as he went. As he passed Durgadas's house, a voice from the women's quarters answered: "I am coming, brother." The women were amazed to find that the stranger was none other than Gadadhar in disguise. Durgadas, thus outwitted, was at first annoyed but later entered into the fun of the situation and congratulated the boy on his success. The ice being thus broken, the ladies of this family, too, began to frequent Sitanath Pyne's house when Gadadhar was there. And when he would fall into trances during the devotional songs, they would worship him, thinking that Krishna or Gauranga was manifesting in that pure body. Later, they presented him with a gold flute and a complete outfit for both male and female parts. The women of the Pyne family cherished his memory during their whole lives; and when, in 1893, some of the monastic disciples of Sri Ramakrishna paid a visit to Kamarpukur, Rukmini, one of Sitanath's daughters, then sixty years old gave the following interesting account of their association with Gadadhar: "You see our house there, a little to the north. It is now in a dilapidated state; and very few members of our family survive. I was then seventeen or eighteen years of age. Ours was a thriving family. Sitanath Pyne was my father, and we were altogether seventeen or eighteen sisters and cousins, all of about the same age. Gadadhar used to play with us from his very boyhood. We were, therefore, in terms of close intimacy with him. Even after we had married and come of age, he used to visit our house; and though he had grown up, he had free access to our inner apartments. My father loved him dearly and adored him like his own Ishta. 'You have so many girls at home,' complained some neighbours to my father, 'and Gadadhar is not young; why do you allow him to visit your family so frequently?' 'Don't you worry,' my father would reply, 'I know Gadadhar too well to think ill of him.' Gadadhar used to recite stories for us from the Puranas as we went about our daily household duties. How can I describe the bliss that we enjoyed in his company? If perchance he missed a day, we became extremely restless, thinking that he might be ill. One of us would go to Chandra Devi's on some pretext or other,

whilst the others waited at home for news. His every word was a delight to our ears ; the days he was unable to be with us we spent in talking of him."

Not only did he make an abiding impression on the women of the village, but he influenced the men also by his amiable character and versatile genius. He often joined them in the evening when they congregated for Kirtana or to read passages from the *Bhagavata* or other holy books. There were several such centres in the village. No one in the village could read as he did or explain so lucidly. His fervour, frequent ecstatic moods, melodious voice, and graceful dancing sent a thrill of joy into the hearts of the villagers. And his merriment and jests were enjoyed by all.

Though Gadadhar was restless, buoyant, and merry, they were not blind to his wonderful intelligence and deep insight ; and he often amazed them with his wisdom. He had the unusual power of seeing everything from a different angle, and was often able to solve questions when the wisest among the men of the village were unable to do so. He never hesitated to say exactly what he meant, which made hypocrites shun his company for fear of exposure. There were some few amongst the villagers who were fortunate enough to be able to recognise his great spiritual potentialities, and predicted a great future for him, although not the direction in which he would develop. An instance of this kind has already been narrated in connection with Shrinivas.

It was about this time that the idea seems to have come to him that he was destined to fulfil some great mission in life, he did not know what, though the realization of God was to him even then the only purpose worthy of consideration. The monastic life had a strong attraction for him. Much as he would have liked to have taken up the begging bowl and renounced everything for the Lord's sake, the thought of the plight of his mother and brothers made him forgo his desire. In the struggle between the two ideas he was powerless to decide, and could do nothing but resign himself to the guidance of Raghuvir, fully believing that He would show the way out when the time came.

His aversion to school was becoming daily more pronounced, and he would have given it up but for his friends

there, specially Gayavishnu. But a way to leave school without causing distress to any one unexpectedly presented itself. An amateur dramatic company was formed in the village, and Gadadhar was asked to join it and take the chief roles. As he did not have time for both school and study of the various dramatic presentations, he chose the thing that appealed to him, and was thus able to give up school with a clear conscience. The mango grove of Manik Raja was the place selected for rehearsals. Gadadhar not only played the chief roles, but took upon himself the task of training the other boys. Incidents from the lives of Sri Rama and Sri Krishna were dramatized. From the start, the project was a success. Gadadhar was in his element, and we are told of his frequent trances during the performances.

At this time Gadadhar showed marked talent in painting and clay modelling, though he had had no special training. His powerful concentration and intuitive idealism were great help. He would often surprise professional moulders by pointing out inaccuracies in the execution of some delicate part of an image, the eyes, for instance, and would direct them how to set them aright. In his ecstatic moods he saw various divine forms ; and these visions, coupled with his artistic faculty, developed his critical faculty and enabled him to produce figures of great beauty.

Gadadhar was now seventeen years old, and Ramkumar was finding that he could not manage all his duties in Calcutta alone. Besides teaching in the Tol, he had to conduct the worship in a number of families. This increased his work so much that he felt the need of an assistant. On one of his visits to Kamarpukur he marked Gadadhar's peculiar indifference towards school ; and when he learnt that Gadadhar had given up his studies and was roaming the village with his friends and companions, he decided, after hurried consultation with his mother and Rameshwar, to take him to Calcutta, where he might supervise his studies and have his help in his household duties. Gadadhar readily agreed to this proposal, and on an auspicious¹ day he set out for Calcutta with the blessings of Raghuvir and his mother.

As he bade farewell to Kamarpukur and all its happy

¹ From the standpoint of Hindu astrology.

memories extending over a period of seventeen years, his heart was overpowered with grief. The future, with all its undisclosed possibilities, lay before him ; and he was making a step forth into the unknown, leaving behind the security of home and the love of all his childhood friends, to say nothing of the aching void in the hearts of the men and women to whom he had come to mean so much.

This, in short, is the first of the four great acts in the drama about to unfold itself at Dakshineswar. To put it differently, it marked, as it were, the first stage of development of a gigantic banyan, the numerous branches of which were destined to afford shelter and comfort to millions of weary travellers in the wilderness of the world.

"BREAD-WINNING EDUCATION"

Gadadhar began to assist Ramkumar in his daily work. In the Tol Ramkumar taught astrology and Hindu law. The income from the school was not much ; he could ill afford to forgo the money derived from officiating as family priest, little time as he had for it. When Gadadhar came to Calcutta, he was, therefore, entrusted with the duties of the priest, which he was glad to discharge. In a short time he made his influence felt in the families he visited. The heads of these families, particularly the women, found striking contrast in his behaviour to that of his predecessors. Instead of hurrying through his work, he would perform it with great diligence and conspicuous devotion ; his honesty, rectitude, devotion, and purity of heart impressed all who came in contact with him. He would pass hours in these families either singing by request his favourite songs or rendering little services. The simplicity and integrity of his character removed all barriers to free association with them. Here, too, he soon formed a circle of friends and admirers, all belonging to respectable families, like that of the late Raja Digambar Mitter, in whose company he delighted to spend his time. Hence he did not have much leisure for his studies, and Ramkumar found that one of the objects in having the boy with him was being frustrated. For the first few months he gave the boy liberty, for he knew he was unaccustomed to any repression. In his native village he used to roam at will and do whatever he liked. Now he was in new surroundings and amongst strange faces ; and Ramkumar thought it best to be indulgent until his old friends and associations of Kamarpukur were forgotten. So he allowed him to enjoy the new friends so that he might forget the sorrow of separation from the old. But when, after some months, Gadadhar still showed no interest in his studies, Ramkumar thought it unwise to countenance any further laxity. The fortunes of the once prosperous Chatterjee family were fast dwindling, and it was necessary that Gadadhar become independent and add to the family income as well. Rameshwar, though a man of attainments, was not a money-maker. Gadadhar's

behaviour did not warrant the hope that he would be any better. On the contrary, he manifested a complete indifference to worldly matters. One day Ramkumar took the boy aside and admonished him for his apathy towards education and his general indifference.

"Brother, what shall I do with a mere bread-winning education?"—was the spirited reply of the boy, "I would rather acquire that wisdom which will illumine my heart and getting which one is satisfied for ever." Ramkumar did not realize the full import of this laconic answer, for he was ignorant of the inner psychology of this wonderful, precocious boy. Gadadhar looked at the world with a different eye. His brother's experience had somewhat reconciled him to the selfishness of the world. At home Gadadhar saw that the aim and purpose of average humanity was towards the senses; things seemed no different to him in Calcutta. A few months' stay in this city showed him clearly the drift of the people's minds as well as their motives. They were running after the-transitory pleasures of the world and dying for name and fame. Enjoyment and the survival of the fittest were the watchwords of the day, and this precious human life was being wasted. God, spirituality, and religion were so many words the import of which had long been forgotten; and the holy books were the legacy of a superstitious ancestry, not worth the paper on which they were written. The education which Gadadhar was receiving tended in the same direction. Obviously it could not satisfy his mind, in which, in the midst of all his daily occupations, the idea was always uppermost that life had a deeper meaning. He realized more and more that he was born for purposes different from those of the ordinary run of men, that he must lead a life commensurate with those purposes. He asked himself, "Shall I obtain piety, devotion, and divine fervour by pursuing this education?" "No," was the emphatic reply. "Will it enable me to be as God-fearing and upright as my father?" "No," the reply echoed from his heart. "Shall I be able to realize God and escape from universal ignorance and clinging to the senses?" Again a negative answer. "Then what shall I do with this education which cannot help me to see God or to transcend the miseries of the world? I would rather remain ignorant all my life than throw away my cherished ideals by not following the path to God"—

was the conclusion the boy reached. Bread and butter could not be the object of human life ; they did not help towards release from disease, infirmity, and death. So the boy longed to acquire that wisdom which would take him across this ocean of life and death. In vain did he look for illumination in the pile of books in his brother's room, or in the scholars of the day: nothing but impervious darkness greeted his eyes. They could not show him the way to reach the goal.

So without a moment's hesitation he gave that reply to his brother's gentle reprimand. Ramkumar could scarcely believe his ears and was puzzled to know what to do. In vain did he try to convince the boy of the utility of learning, painting in glowing colours its bright prospects and the easy and happy life of the educated man of the city. These arguments made no appeal to Gadadhar's reason, nor did they cause him to budge from his position. Ramkumar had to give way for the time being.

Two years rolled on. Ramkumar's pecuniary condition instead of improving became worse ; he found that sooner or later he would have to incur debts which he had no prospects of repaying. The hereditary profession of priesthood and teaching was not very lucrative, but knowing nothing else he had to cling to it. But he surrendered himself to the will of Raghuvir and let himself drift along the current of events, as he found it futile to struggle against it. When matters were approaching a climax, a new event, with far reaching consequences in the life of young Gadadhar, coming from a most unexpected quarter, gave Ramkumar fresh courage.

THE DAKSHINESWAR TEMPLE

In the Jaun Bazar quarter of Calcutta there lived a rich widow named Rani Rasmani, with four daughters. On the death of her husband, Rai Raj Chandra Das, she had inherited immense properties, and so carefully and intelligently did she administer the affairs of the estate that she bequeathed it to her successor with increased revenues. Besides her business ability and courage, she was remarkable as well for devotion to God, faith in religion, and love and sympathy for the poor. To this day her extensive charities are still spoken of, and various charitable works in and near Calcutta remain to testify to her generosity.

She was fortunate in having as son-in-law Mathura Mohan or Mathura Nath Bishwas, her peer in every respect and a competent assistant in the management of her affairs. He was married to the Rani's third daughter, on whose death he took the fourth, Jagadamba Dasi, as wife.

The goddess Kali was Rani Rasmani's special object of devotion, her image even appearing on the seal of the estate. For many years she had the desire to make a pilgrimage to Banaras, and had even set aside money for the purpose, but the heavy burden of administration of the estate always stood in the way. But when Mathur signified his willingness to shoulder the burden, she proceeded to make arrangements to fulfil her heart's desire. Everything was in readiness, and the Rani had a dream in which the goddess appeared to her, ordered her to abandon the journey, and told her to build and dedicate a temple to Her on the bank of the Ganga. If this were done, She promised to manifest Herself there in the image set up.

Another account says that Rasmani had actually set out on the pilgrimage, and on her boat on the Ganga beside the village of Dakshineswar she had her dream. Whatever the truth of the matter might be, she abandoned the idea of the pilgrimage and set about carrying out the divine injunction. In the year 1847 twenty acres of land at Dakshineswar on the Ganga was purchased from Mr. Hastie, an Attorney of the

Calcutta Supreme Court ; and the temple buildings, which took some eight years to complete, were begun.

Dakshineswar is four miles to the north of Calcutta. The Ganga flows by the west side of the temple garden, where its bathing ghat is located. A visitor coming by boat to see the temple first ascends these steps and enters a large open portico which is placed in the middle of a row of twelve Shiva temples, on the north and south of it. East of these there is a paved court, in the centre of which are two large temples, the one on the north, dedicated to Krishna and Radha and that on the south to the goddess Kali. In the latter, on a beautiful thousand-petalled silver lotus, lies the prostrate figure of Shiva on whose breast, facing the south, stands the Divine Mother known as Bhavatarini or the "Saviour of the world" chiselled out of a single piece of basalt. There are nine domes with spires to this temple. In front of it is the spacious music hall, a rectangular court, the gorgeous terrace of which is supported by stately pillars. On the south, east, and north sides of the courtyard are rooms used as quarters for the temple-staff, and store-rooms, kitchens, etc. In the north-west corner of the courtyard and immediately to the north of the row of Shiva temples is a chamber which is of special interest to us, for it was here that Sri Ramakrishna lived while in the temple. This room has a semi-circular verandah on the west, whence he could view the Ganga. In front of this balcony is a path running north and south ; further west is the flower garden, and just beneath that flows the Ganga. Outside the temple compound proper, lying to the north of it, is a building which is used by the members of Rasmani's family when they visit the garden. There are two concert-rooms, one on the south-west and the other on the north-west corner of the temple compound. The garden is provided with two tanks, and many trees and plants add to its beauty. The most noticeable of these trees is the large banyan which played so conspicuous a part in the life of Sri Ramakrishna, and next in importance is the Bael tree on the northern extremity of the garden. We shall have occasion to refer to them later on.

The day fixed for the installation of the statue of the goddess was May 31st, 1855, a sacred day, known as Snanayatra. Everything was ready, and the Rani's heart was filled with joy

at the thought that the fulfilment of the Mother's promise to manifest Herself there and to bless her was so close at hand. But at the last moment, certain unforeseen obstacles arose which seemed to destroy her plans.

In this bustle of preparation for the dedication an important fact had been overlooked. The Rani was a Shudra by caste, and, therefore, no orthodox Brahmin would officiate as her priest, or partake of sacramental food in her temple, for according to the orthodox custom it was derogatory to a Brahmin to worship for a Shudra or to accept gifts from him. The Rani was in a dilemma, for not only could there be no installation ceremony without a priest, but a purpose she had secretly cherished for a long time of making an offering of cooked rice to her beloved Kali would be defeated as well, for the right of offering cooked rice was essentially a Brahminical one, not shared with the other castes; and if no priest could be found to dedicate the temple or to make the offering for her, things would be at a deadlock. But she was a woman of courage and determination, not to be daunted by even the greatest difficulties, and she sought the sanction of the Shastras, writing to many Pundits for opinions. None of the replies was favourable. The Rani was in despair. The plans of a lifetime seemed to be coming to naught. It was at this moment that a letter came from Ramkumar in which he expressed the opinion that if the Rani made a gift of the Kali temple to a Brahmin, endowing it with sufficient funds for maintenance, it would be in keeping with the injunctions of the Shastras, and no Brahmin would be considered degraded by acting as priest or partaking of the food offered there. Though there was some grumbling amongst the Pundits at this opinion, the Rani was much pleased, not only at the liberality of the views expressed, but also at the opportunity it gave her to carry out her plans. Indeed such an opinion was heretical, and it required great courage on Ramkumar's part to voice it.

But the Shastric sanction alone was not sufficient. The Rani had to get a Brahmin sufficiently learned in the scriptures to perform the Puja ceremony in accordance with their injunctions. There were many difficulties in the way because of the rigidity of the caste system. A temple built by a Shudra woman was regarded with suspicion, and no high caste Brahmin

would worship there, to say nothing of accepting the office of priest. Even though the Kali temple had been given over to a Brahmin, one acting as priest for a Shudra woman would lose honour with his fellow Brahmins.

It was Mahesh Chandra Chatterjee of Sihore, a friend of Ramkumar and an employee of Rani Rasmani, who cut the Gordian knot. He appointed Kshetra Nath, his elder brother, priest to the Radhakanta temple, knowing that if one Brahmin were willing to accept office there, others would follow his lead. To find a priest for the Kali temple was more difficult. In his extremity he thought of Ramkumar, whose scholarship and devotion he knew. But the difficulty with him was that he came of a very orthodox family that adhered rigidly to the rules and practices enjoined by the scriptures. But there was no time to lose, for the day of the consecration of the temple and the installation of the goddess was drawing near. Accordingly, Mahesh went to Rani Rasmani and asked her to send to Ramkumar through him an invitation to become priest of the Kali temple. The Rani wrote to Ramkumar as directed, saying that as it was due to his advice and suggestions that the consecration of the temple to Kali had been made possible, she depended upon him to extricate her from another awkward position, that of having no competent person to perform the opening ceremonies. She said further that such a sacred and responsible task could not be entrusted to every Brahmin, and that a pious and learned person such as he was indispensable. Armed with this letter Mahesh went to see Ramkumar and explained the situation. He asked Ramkumar to take the place only until a competent priest would be found. Ramkumar agreed on this condition ; but charmed by the kind and respectful treatment of the Rani and Mathur, he remained there till his death.

The day of consecration arrived. The ceremony was performed with great pomp. Thousands of beggars were fed sumptuously. Learned Brahmins were invited from afar to grace the occasion, and they were duly honoured. It is said that the Rani spent altogether nine lakhs of rupees for the construction of the temple and its opening ceremony. She further bought a large zemindary for two lakhs and twenty-six thousand rupees in the District of Dinajpur from Trailokya Nath Tagore, and set its income apart for the maintenance of the Kali temple.

by a deed of gift which she executed before her death.

The temple was consecrated. The Divine Mother who is Life and Consciousness itself was invoked to be permanently present in the beautiful stone image there. The dream of Rasmani was fulfilled, and her devoted heart was overjoyed. Her great devotion as well as the deep reverential attitude of the gifted priest soon made the image instinct, as it were, with life. The temple of Dakshineswar has ever since been a haven of peace to many. With its atmosphere of purity, its sequestered groves and bowers, the sacred Ganga flowing by, and above all, the presence of a God-man who was soon to come to it and bless it for ever, this temple has become a place of pilgrimage and a favourite resort for thousands of devoted and contemplative devotees. Even now the lofty spires of the temples and tops of the tamarisk trees are pointed out to strangers by the boatmen as monuments to the piety of Rani Rasmani, and the pilgrims bow their heads in reverence before the Divine Mother and Her hallowed sanctum.

Sri Ramakrishna used often to tell of the events incident to the consecration ceremony to his disciples. He corroborated the stories of the Rani's arrangements for the pilgrimage to Banaras, the collection of a fleet of about one hundred boats filled with the necessary equipment, and the abandonment of the journey at the injunction of the Divine Mother in a dream the night before departure. He further used to say that Rani Rasmani's search for a suitable place near Bally, Uttarpara, etc., on the west bank of the Ganga—considered very holy—proved futile, as the zemindars of those places, even when offered enormous prices, refused to permit a ghat on the Ganga within their jurisdiction. He used to remark that the plot selected at Dakshineswar for the temple happened to be an abandoned cemetery and had a convex surface, which according to the Tantras were good features for a place of Shakti-worship. He also told of how Rani Rasmani, from the beginning of the moulding of the image, practised the utmost austerity in food, sleep, and general mode of living, and performed worship and Japa, etc., to the best of her power, that she was forced to fix the date of consecration hurriedly on a full-moon day—which was more appropriate to the worship of Vishnu than that of Shakti—as the image of the goddess, which was locked up in a

box, for some unknown reason was covered with a deposit of mist, and the Rani was told in a dream by the goddess to have the installation ceremony at an early date, as She could no longer endure the box. The Master also confirmed the truth of the story that the Rani conveyed the temple to her spiritual guide to overcome the difficulties arising from her being of a low caste. He would tell of the great pomp with which the ceremony was performed, of the gorgeousness of the illumination etc., of how the whole place rang with Kirtanas, dramatic performances and recitals from the sacred books.

Sri Ramakrishna—henceforth we shall call him by this more familiar name¹—though he enjoyed the festival, did not partake of any food in the temple, but purchased and ate a pice worth of puffed rice in the evening before his return to the Tol at Jhamapukur. When he found that Ramkumar, instead of returning to his school work, stayed on at the temple, he was much disturbed. He went to Dakshineswar to ascertain the reason and found that Ramkumar, unable to withstand the importunities and kindnesses of the Rani, had accepted the permanent office of priest there. He tried to influence his brother against such a course reminding him of his father's steadfast observance of the traditions of the Chatterjees, and telling him that he would be the first to tarnish the fair fame of their family, which had always been revered for its refusal of gifts from the Shudras, to say nothing of accepting any position from them. Ramkumar was adamant and quoted from the scriptures to justify himself, trying by every means in his power to make his brother agree with him, but to no avail. As a last resort they drew lots after the fashion of country folk; and Ramkumar won. Accepting this as final Sri Ramakrishna still refused to take food in the temple. At last Ramkumar told him to take rice and vegetables from the temple stores and to do his own cooking on the bank of the Ganga. Ramakrishna yielded. From this time on, he stayed at Dakshineswar with his brother, but he continued to cook and eat his food apart for some time.

He soon accommodated himself to his new surroundings.

¹ Ramakrishna is the name, supplanting his old one, which gained currency during the Master's stay at Dakshineswar. No definite information as to its origin is available. Most probably it was given by Mathur Babu, the son-in-law of Rani Rasmani, as Ramlal, the nephew of Sri Ramakrishna, says on the authority of his illustrious uncle himself.

The holy atmosphere of that sequestered place, the affectionate care of his elder brother, the respect of Rani Rasmani and Mathur, and lastly his conviction of the presence of the goddess there captured his heart.

Throughout his life Sri Ramakrishna cherished a great devotion to the Ganga. He would often say, "The water of the Ganga is as pure as Brahman. Even an agnostic attains devotion if he but lives on its banks. The whole area over which the wind charged with particles of its water blows is sanctified, and the residents of that area are spiritually awakened without any effort." If any one of his devotees indulging in wordly talk or associated with worldly people, the Master would ask him to drink a little Ganga water. If any spot were vitiated by the touch of an exceptionally worldly man, he would have it sprinkled with Ganga water. This devotion to the Ganga was ingrained in him from boyhood. So when Ramkumar appealed to him in the name of the Ganga, all doubts regarding the food disappeared from his mind. Some may condemn this attitude of Sri Ramakrishna towards the temple Prasad, calling it bigoted. But it was nothing of the sort. It was due to his steadiness in devotion (Nishtha) to the ideas inculcated by his caste and family as well as by the Shastras. Nevertheless, it was this devotion to the ideal as understood at the time that eventually carried him to the point where he perceived that anything offered to and accepted by the Mother, must, of necessity, be pure. As his knowledge increased and his vision enlarged, all differentiating ideas of caste and creed automatically dropped off. What an object lesson for us is this seemingly trifling incident!

BEFORE THE DIVINE MOTHER

It was not long before Mathur noticed the presence of a strange young man of fair complexion and striking devotion in the Kali temple. As he observed the youth going about his daily duties, he felt strangely drawn to him. This attraction towards a poor, humble, unostentatious Brahmin boy puzzled Mathur. He made inquiries about Sri Ramakrishna and found that he was the youngest brother of Ramkumar. A desire arose in his mind to connect Sri Ramakrishna, too, in some way with the work in the Kali temple, and he even spoke of his desire to Ramkumar. The latter was not very enthusiastic, for he knew his brother's strange psychology, his indifference to pecuniary gain and personal pleasure, and the spirit of independence and desire for freedom which made him dislike routine work. Though discouraged, Mathur gave up the idea for the time being only, hoping that later some opportunity would come which would enable him to gratify his desire.

It was at this time that Hriday, a young man destined to be a close companion of Sri Ramakrishna for twenty-five years, a faithful attendant during the stormy days of his Sadhana, a sincere friend in all his troubles of this period, and a mute witness of his various divine realizations, appeared on the scene. He was the son of Hemangini Devi, who was the daughter of Khudiram's sister. He was slightly younger than his uncle and had been one of his boyhood chums. As a boy Sri Ramakrishna went often to Sihore to visit him. At the time of which we are speaking, Hriday was sixteen years of age. He could find no employment in his native village; in the nearest town of Burdwan he had no better luck. Then he remembered that his uncles were living in the newly established Kali temple of Rani Rasmani and thought that through their influence some employment might be offered to him. So he joined them at Dakshineswar. Sri Ramakrishna was delighted. Hriday, knowing his uncle's nature, made no comment on any of his actions. As he said later, he felt the magnetism of his uncle's towering personality and followed him about like his shadow. They performed all their tasks together, separating only at mealtime.

Sri Ramakrishna, cooked the food (prepared for him by Hriday) on the bank of the Ganga while Hriday took his dinner in the Kali temple.

It seemed almost a divine dispensation that Hriday Ram came to Dakshineswar. He was a very clever man, with great presence of mind, exceptionally energetic and always ready to bear cheerfully any personal discomfort if thereby he could help his uncle. And he became quite indispensable to Sri Ramakrishna during his period of God-intoxication, when, lost in Samadhi, he was absolutely incapable of taking care of his body.

At this time, Sri Ramakrishna became aware of the fact that Mathur was keeping him under observation, and of his designs to make him one of the Kali temple priests ; so he avoided him whenever possible. But one day, as he was worshipping, in the compound of the Kali temple, an image of Shiva moulded by himself, Mathur, taking advantage of his absorption, was able to come close enough to see the image. The perfection of its modelling impressed him so much that he made inquiries as to who was the sculptor. When he learnt that it had been made by Sri Ramakrishna, he was delighted, and begged that the image might be given to him after the worship was over. He again approached Ramkumar on the subject of attaching his brother to the Kali temple staff, and in spite of a second refusal, was more determined than ever to acquire the services of Sri Ramakrishna in the worship of Kali.

Sri Ramakrishna's apathetic attitude towards work in the temple was due to his intense conviction that nothing was worth doing but the conquest of the flesh, renunciation of wealth, and the attainment of God-consciousness. But this avoidance of Mathur could not go on for ever. Living as Sri Ramakrishna did in the temple garden, it was inevitable that, sooner or later, they would meet. One day the encounter took place. Mathur saw Sri Ramakrishna and Hriday talking together near the Kali temple ; before Sri Ramakrishna could make his escape, he sent for him. When Sri Ramakrishna hesitated Hriday asked him why he was reluctant to respond to the command. "When I do so, he will ask me to take up some duties in the temple," said Sri Ramakrishna. "What harm is there in that ?" asked Hriday. "He is a good and pious man, and it is no discredit to work for him." Sri Ramakrishna quietly said, "I have no

intention of being bound for life. Besides, the service in the Kali temple implies a heavy responsibility, for I would have to take charge of the valuable ornaments of the goddess, and it would worry me. If you agree to take that responsibility, I may accede to Mathur Babu's request." Hriday agreed, for he had come to Dakshineswar in search of suitable employment, and here it was. Sri Ramakrishna spoke with Mathur and, when requested to accept service in the Kali temple, agreed to do so on the above terms. These were accepted, and Sri Ramakrishna and Hriday were appointed to the positions. Sri Ramakrishna took over the dressing and decorating of the Divine Mother, Hriday assisting Ramkumar and Ramakrishna.

Soon after his appointment in the Kali temple, an incident occurred which enhanced the worth of Sri Ramakrishna in the eyes of Rani Rasmami and Mathur. It was the custom in the Dakshineswar temple to put the images of Krishna and Radha in the next room between services. They were replaced on the throne in the morning and at 4 o'clock in the afternoon. On the day following the Jannashtami¹ festival, the priest, Kshetra Nath, was taking the image of Krishna to the retiring room, when he slipped on the marble floor, and one leg of the image was broken. This gave rise to a great commotion in the temple. Poor Kshetra Nath was immediately dismissed for carelessness. The incident was considered an evil omen for the family. A broken image could not be worshipped; and when the news was sent to Rani Rasmami, she was greatly disturbed. She consulted Mathur and convened a gathering of the Pundits to advise her what to do. After a great deal of discussion the conclusion was reached that it was contrary to the scriptures to worship the Lord in a broken image, that the Rani must throw it into the Ganga and install a new one in its place. A new image was at once ordered. But the Rani was extremely reluctant to consign the object of her former worship to the Ganga, and at the suggestion of Mathur, who had been deeply impressed by Sri Ramakrishna's trances, she sought the latter's opinion on the matter. After hearing the whole story Sri Ramakrishna in an exalted mood exclaimed, "Their solution is ridiculous. If a son-in-law of the Rani fractured his leg, would she discard him and put another in his stead? Would she not rather arrange

¹The anniversary of Sri Krishna's birthday.

for his treatment ? Why not do the same thing here ? Let the image be repaired and worshipped as before." When this startling solution was communicated to the Pundits they were puzzled. Because it proceeded straight from the heart, it was so convincing, although so simple. It did not satisfy the scholars at first, but they finally had to yield. Rani Rasmani was jubilant. She had already seen the proof of the young priest's skill in sculpture, so she begged him to mend the broken image. He consented and repaired the limb so adroitly, that even careful scrutiny did not reveal where the break had been. When the new image arrived, Mathur took it to Sri Ramakrishna and asked if it were exactly like the original ; Sri Ramakrishna fell into a trance and said, "No, it is not." So it was set aside. A new priest was needed to fill the vacancy caused by the dismissal of Kshetra Nath, and Mathur requested Ramkumar to persuade Sri Ramakrishna to accept the post. Sri Ramakrishna consented. Hriday was appointed to help Ramkumar to dress and decorate the image of Kali.

FIRST VISION OF THE DIVINE MOTHER

Silently and secretly they come into the world, like a flash of lightning, survey it, and in the twinkling of an eye disappear : few see them, fewer understand them, and still fewer follow their advice. This is the life-history of most great men—prophets, seers, and Incarnations—in all ages and in all climes. Christ died on the cross like an ordinary felon. Of his twelve disciples, one denied him in the hour of trial. Now millions accept him as their ideal. Buddha left behind him only a handful of followers, and today after twenty-five centuries one-third of the world pays him homage. Yet why should we wonder at the world's lack of comprehension? How can we understand them with our limited vision? The strong alone can understand strength: it is not the barn-door fowl but the elephant that understands the lion. Only grandeur appreciates grandeur: and God realizes God. Though the real Christ and Buddha are in us, it is not until we realize that fact, that we can envisage a Buddha or a Christ. But let the perception come that liberation or bondage, virtue or vice, knowledge or ignorance, beauty or ugliness, truth or falsehood, pleasure or pain, and all the other pairs of opposites which seem so real to us are nothing but the creation of the mind—the obverse and reverse of the same coin—and a change will be made in the angle of vision, a shifting of the mental focus, and the whole series of phenomena—father, mother, home, me and mine—will vanish, to give place to another series of phenomena, another creation, and another world, to which the Great Ones have easy access, and where they would have us dwell.

We are now about to enter a new chapter in the life of Sri Ramakrishna, the beauty, grandeur, loftiness, and pathos of which will fascinate the readers as they follow step by step the progress of this eager aspirant from the early outpourings of his heart in devotion at the feet of the Divine Mother, through the period of his unquenchable thirst to see Her, on to the consummation of his Sadhana in the realization of God, and the establishment—or rather rediscovery—of his relation to him—a sublime achievement equalled only by that of the other Great

Ones of the world. We wish we might be able to express an infinitesimal part of his throbbing renunciation, tremendous sincerity, and passionate search for God. So great was his yearning for God that twelve strenuous years passed in a state of divine intoxication, during half of which period he did not close his eyes in sleep. Unconscious of hunger, thirst, or any of the cravings of the body, or of the things happening around him, Sri Ramakrishna, during that period of Sadhana, was almost like a madman. Day after day, month after month, year after year, he was immersed in the depths of that intense spiritual fervour.

Sri Ramakrishna was appointed priest of the Radhakanta¹ temple. Mathur found that his mode of worship was different from that of the ordinary Brahmins, in that he looked upon the image as the veritable representation of God and treated it as such. When he sat down to worship, a curtain of oblivion separated him from the outside world: he was totally unconscious of the presence of those who usually gathered to attend the services. Sometimes he would sit motionless for hours, being recalled with difficulty to ordinary consciousness. While uttering the various Mantras he could distinctly see those phenomena which to the ordinary priest were but phantoms of the imagination. Thus while chanting the mystic syllable *Rang*, which directed the priest to conceive of a wall of fire around him, Sri Ramakrishna really found himself in the midst of a circle of fire guarding himself and the place of worship from all evil influence. He could actually feel the mystic power called the Kundalini, or the "coiled up", rushing from its place of rest at the lower extremity of the spinal column, along the channel of the Sushumna, to what the Yogis called the Sahasrara or the thousand-petalled lotus of the brain, and could visualize it passing on its upward way through the six centres of the body in the spinal cord, turning the hanging buds of the "lotuses"² into erect, full-blown flowers. The radiant glow of his face at the time of worship, his deep concentration and the atmosphere of purity about him suggested to the onlookers the idea that the very spirit Brahmanahood as described in the sacred books was

¹ Radhakanta is another name for Krishna.

² This refers to the path of Raja-Yoga which has to do with the development of the different centres of the spinal cord. In mystical language these centres are called lotuses.

being manifested there. None had ever seen such intensity of feeling and devotion.

Sri Ramakrishna adapted himself to his new station and forgot everything else. Ramkumar was gratified, for it gave him time to direct his attention to the welfare of the family ; besides he felt that his end was approaching ; and if one of his brother succeeded him, the future of the family would be assured. But he was troubled by Sri Ramakrishna's love for solitude and growing indifference to the world. He hoped that it was a passing mood, and that he would begin to take part in the festivities of the Kali temple, instead of passing his leisure hours in the thick groves of the temple garden, sitting silent under a tree far away from the bustle, or worse still, taking long solitary walks in the quiet of the early morning or before dusk, along the bank of the Ganga. He resolved to teach him the elaborate procedure of the worship of Kali, so that, later, he might assume the task. As it was not considered advisable to undertake the worship of Shakti or Kali without being properly initiated, Sri Ramakrishna decided to be initiated. At this time there was a Brahmin in Calcutta named Kenaram Bhattacharya, who was noted for his devotion and experience, and Sri Ramakrishna decided to accept him as Guru. A day was fixed, and the ceremony took place. It is said that as soon as the sacred Mantra was uttered in his ears, Sri Ramakrishna, overwhelmed with religious fervour, gave a shout and plunged into a deep concentration, which greatly astonished the Guru.

From this time on Ramkumar asked his brother now and then to take over the worship of the Divine Mother, while he himself worshipped at the altar of Radha-Kanta instead. Mathur noticed this and one day requested Sri Ramakrishna to take over the permanent worship of Kali. "Sir, I do not know the procedure of that worship," he replied, "so how can I perform the sacred task according to the injunctions of the Shastras ?" But Mathur humbly said, "You do not require any Shastric code ; your great devotion and sincerity alone will satisfy the goddess. Whatever you offer at the feet of the Mother with love, She will accept. Because of your devotion the Mother will surely manifest Herself through this image." Sri Ramakrishna, touched at the implicit faith of Mathur, agreed, and Ramkumar was transferred to the temple of Radha-Kanta. Ramkumar was

aged now, and the sustained labour at the temple garden was telling on his health ; he decided to go home for a change. Mathur agreed to engage Hriday for a few months during Ramkumar's absence, and the latter arranged to start home as soon as possible. But he was destined never to see his home or dear relatives again, for he breathed his last at a place a few miles north of Calcutta, where he had gone on urgent business. He had served in the Kali temple of Dakshineswar for only a year.

The death of Ramkumar left an indelible impression upon the mind of Sri Ramakrishna. He was so young at the time of his father's death that all his filial affection was given to his elder brother. His death, therefore, came as a great shock to him, for it occurred at a time when his mind was in a state of upheaval—when he was fast realizing the transitoriness of the phenomenal world and all his energies were given to the search for something that was real and imperishable. Convinced that man could transcend all miseries and evils and reach immortality only by knowing the sweet and perennial fountain of all bliss, his yearning to realize God and the pangs of separation from Him became inexpressible. While those about him were wasting time in all sorts of frivolity, he was burning day and night with this consuming thirst for God. It was at this time that he was asked to conduct the services of the Divine Mother. After his initiation, Kali became his favourite Deity. Every day at the time of worship he decorated Her image with flowers and sandal-paste ; to him it was not inert stone but Mother Herself. All who have seen it agree that the lovely figure, with its divine expression, is a rare piece of sculpture. The Mother wears a gorgeous Banaras cloth and is decorated with precious ornaments from head to foot. From Her neck hangs a garland of skulls and round Her waist is a girdle of human arms—made of gold. In Her lower left hand She holds a decapitated human head, also made of gold, and in the upper a sword. With Her lower right hand She offers boons to Her devotees ; with the upper is symbolized, "Fear nothing!" The skulls and the sword represent Her terrible side, and Her right hands offering boons and fearlessness the benign side. She is both terrible and sweet—like Nature—alternately destroying and creating. This is the Mother whom Sri Ramakrishna worshipped, the Preserver as well as the

Destroyer. But to him She was ever the affectionate Mother—the Repository of all blessedness and power—sweet, tender, and full of motherly solicitude, the Mother who with loving care protects Her devotees from harm. To Her he offered a whole-hearted devotion, regarding Her as the only true guide in darkness and confusion.

So sensitive was he becoming, that he was forced to avoid all contacts with so-called worldly people. He passed the quiet hours of the afternoon alone. At night, when everyone was asleep he would arise and go out, returning after daybreak, with eyes swollen as though with much weeping, or showing the effects of prolonged meditation. To all inquiries as to where he had been he gave evasive answers. Hriday determined to watch him and solve the mystery.

The plot of land lying to the north of the temple, where Sri Ramakrishna passed long years in meditation and asceticism, now known as the Panchavati, was not then as it is now. It was a dense jungle of low, uneven land thickly grown with shrubs and prickly plants, where the sunshine scarcely ever penetrated. Its having been a graveyard kept people at a respectful distance, and none had ever dared to explore it. Sri Ramakrishna chose this place for his spiritual practices and used to spend his afternoons and nights in meditation in the shade of a large Amalaka tree which grew there.

Hriday loved his uncle and took care of him day and night like a devoted servant. Occasionally he caught a glimpse of the workings of his mind; but for the most part, he shared the popular opinion that Sri Ramakrishna's strange actions were due to too intense devotion to God. So when to unmindfulness of food or drink or the comforts of the body was added the passing of the whole nights without sleep, Hriday was much concerned and felt that he was justified in watching his uncle to find out where he went at night and how he spent his time. Knowing that opposition or protest was futile, he waited his opportunity; and one night, when Sri Ramakrishna left his room, he followed. What was his horror to see him entering the jungle!

Hriday was afraid to follow him, so he remained at a distance and began to throw stones in order to frighten Sri Ramakrishna, but without success. The following morning, when

questioned by Hriday as to what he did in the jungle, Sri Ramakrishna replied quietly, "There is a large Amalaka tree there, and under it I meditate on Kali. Such a place is highly suitable for meditation." Hriday was not satisfied with this explanation and continued to spy upon and throw stones at Sri Ramakrishna whenever he went into the jungle. Sri Ramakrishna made no remonstrance. Finding that intimidation was fruitless, Hriday gathered up his courage and determined to enter the jungle at dead of night to see for himself what was going on. He was startled to find his uncle, without clothes or the sacred thread, under the tree in deep meditation. In spite of a feeling of awe with which this sight inspired him, Hriday said to Sri Ramakrishna, "What is this, uncle? Why have you taken off your cloth and the sacred thread?" There was no response. It was as if he were addressing a statue. When Sri Ramakrishna returned to ordinary consciousness, Hriday repeated the question. "Why, don't you know," Sri Ramakrishna replied, "that this is the way one should think of God, free of all ties? Since our very birth we have the eightfold fetters of hatred, shame, pedigree, culture, fear, fame, caste, and egoism. This sacred thread means that I am a Brahmin and, therefore, superior to all. When calling upon the Mother, one has to set such ideas aside. So I have removed the holy thread, which I shall put on after I have finished meditation." Hriday listened and quietly left the place.

Thus the realization of God—the vision of the Divine Mother—became the one passion of Sri Ramakrishna. Strange was the method of worship of this most wonderful devotee. The singing of devotional songs composed by such devotees as Ramprasad and Kamalakanta of Bengal was one of its salient features. They seemed to open the flood-gate of his heart, and he would weep profusely like a child sore at heart at the separation from its mother. "O Mother! Where art Thou? Reveal Thyself to me. Ramprasad saw Thee and obtained Thy divine grace. Am I a wretch that Thou dost not come to me? Pleasure, wealth, friends, enjoyments—I do not want any of these. I only desire to see Thee, Mother." Tears flowed continuously from his eyes. The day would pass; and when the peal of evening bells in the temple announced the close of day, he would become sadder still and cry, "Another day is spent in

vain, Mother, for I have not seen Thee ! Another day of this short life has passed, and I have not realized the Truth !” He would often rub his face against the ground in his agony. His plaintive moans would attract crowds of people, who whispered to one another, “Poor young man ! Has he really lost his mother ? His pathetic cries move one to tears.” In another mood he would sit before the image of Kali and say to Her, “Art Thou true, Mother, or is it all a fiction of the mind—mere poetry without any reality ? If Thou dost exist, why can I not see Thee ? Is religion, then, a phantasy, a mere castle in the air ?” Scarcely would these words pass his lips when in a flash he would recollect the lives of Ramprasad and other devotees who actually saw God in this very life. “She can’t be a mere freak of the human imagination,” the young worshipper would think, “there are people who have actually seen Her. Then why can’t I see Her ? Life is passing away. One day is gone followed by another never to return. Every day I am drawing so much nearer to death. But where is my Mother ? The scriptures say that there is only one thing to be sought in this life, and that is God. Without Him life is unbearable, a mockery. When God is realized, life has a meaning, it is a pleasure, a veritable garden of ease. Therefore in pursuit of God sincere devotees renounce the world and sacrifice their lives. What is this life worth if I am to drag on a miserable existence from day to day without tapping that eternal source of Immortality and Bliss ?” Thoughts like these would only increase his longing, and make him redouble his efforts to realize God.

Referring to this tremendous thirst for God Sri Ramakrishna would often say to his disciples later on, “Oh, what days of suffering I passed through ! You can’t imagine my agony at separation from Mother. That was only natural. Suppose there is a bag of gold in a room and a thief in the next with only a thin partition between. Can he sleep peacefully ? Will he not run about and try to force the wall to get at the gold ? Such was my state. I knew that the Mother, full of infinite bliss, compared with which all earthly possessions were as nothing, was there, quite close to me. How could I be satisfied with anything else ? I had to seek Her. I became mad for Her.”

What tremendous faith, what intense conviction that God

alone is the source of all bliss ! This it was that carried him through and sustained him in many bitter trials and afflictions—the philosophers' stone that turned his sufferings into the bright and shining gold of God-consciousness. It is to faith such as this that the miracles in the spiritual history of the world, in all countries are due. Without a teacher, guide, or helper, with no great knowledge of the scriptures, and even without passing through the prescribed forms of asceticism, Sri Ramakrishna carried everything before him by this adamant faith and sincere yearning to realize God.

He could no longer conduct the worship regularly. He would sit before the image like a stone. At one moment he behaved like a demented person, at the next he would cry like a child. While meditating in the course of worship, he would put a flower on his head and sit silent for a couple of hours; or while offering the food, he would gaze at the Mother as if She were actually partaking of it. In the morning he would pluck the flowers for garlands and spend hours in decorating the image. During the evening service, when waving lights before the goddess, he would lose all idea of time and forget to bring the ceremony to a close. His strange actions were beginning to attract the attention of the temple officials. He was ridiculed at first ; but steady devotion ended by commanding respect and admiration, though some still regarded him as unbalanced. Mathur was charmed. Sri Ramakrishna was perfectly indifferent to what people thought and directed all his energies to the realization of the goal he had set for himself. He took less food and slept very little. His chest and face were always flushed from excessive emotion, the eyes often bathed in tears.

But he was not to be tossed much longer on the waves of despair and hope. One day, in his intense longing to see the Mother, he cried, "Mother, why dost Thou not listen to me ? I have prayed long to Thee. Thou didst bless Ramprasad. Why dost Thou not bless me also by revealing Thyself to me ?"—when, suddenly, his desire was fulfilled. We shall describe this first vision of the Divine Mother in his own words:

"I was then suffering from excruciating pain because I had not been blessed with a vision of the Mother. I felt as if my heart were being squeezed like a wet towel. I was overpowered by a great restlessness and a fear that it might not be my lot to

realize Her in this life. I could not bear the separation any longer: life did not seem worth living. Suddenly my eyes fell on the sword that was kept in the Mother's temple. Determined to put an end to my life, I jumped up like a madman and seized it, when suddenly the blessed Mother revealed Herself to me, and I fell unconscious on the floor. What happened after that externally, or how that day or the next passed, I do not know, but within me there was a steady flow of undiluted, bliss altogether new, and I felt the presence of the Divine Mother."

On another occasion he gave the following description of the same experience:

"The buildings with their different parts, the temple and all vanished from my sight, leaving no trace whatsoever, and in their stead was a limitless, infinite, effulgent ocean of Consciousness or Spirit. As far as the eye could reach, its shining billows were madly rushing towards me, from all sides with a terrific noise, to swallow me up! In the twinkling of an eye they were on me and engulfed me completely. I was panting for breath. I was caught in the billows and fell down senseless!"

Whether or not he saw in this ocean of effulgence that blissful form of the Divine Mother which was so dear to his heart, he did not make clear. It is probable that he did, for as soon as he regained consciousness, he called aloud, "Mother! Mother!"

From this time on, his constant prayer was that he might have a repetition of this vision. Sometimes his desire would become so intense that he would roll on the ground, crying, "Mother, be gracious unto me and reveal Thyself once more." He would cry so bitterly that people gathered about him to see. "I scarcely realized their presence," the Master afterwards said, "they looked more like shadows or painted pictures than real objects, and I did not feel the least abashed at displaying my feelings before them. But the moment I lost outward consciousness in a paroxysm of pain at separation from the Mother, I would find Her standing before me in Her matchless radiant form, granting boons to Her devotees and bidding them to be of good cheer! I used to see Her smiling, talking, consoling, or teaching me in various ways."

GOD-INTOXICATED STATE

The period subsequent to Sri Ramakrishna's first realization of the Divine Mother was quite naturally replete with thrilling incidents of a spiritual nature. He was just stepping into a new realm, vast and limitless. Every day he had extraordinary visions, some of them while in the trance state, others in normal consciousness. Though he lived and moved in this world, he belonged in reality to another region and held communion with strange invisible beings. He was often seen conversing with the stone image of Kali as if it were fully conscious. To the people of the Kali temple all this looked like madness pure and simple. His nephew concluded that the great nervous strain of his Sadhanas had caused some derangement in the brain, and the physician to the Rajas of Bhukailas was consulted. Sri Ramakrishna remained under his treatment for some time, but with no benefit.

The physical shock of the first vision of the Mother was so great that for a time he lost control over his body. When he was calmer and attempted to conduct the worship of the goddess, it would always take unexpected turns. Strange visions and thoughts flashed before him. Before beginning to meditate he would say to himself, "I shall sit silent and unmoved like that image of Bhairava."¹ Sri Ramakrishna afterwards described what would happen: "I could distinctly hear strange rattling sounds in my joints from the ankle upwards, as if one were locking them up one by one, so that the body might remain fixed. I remained perforce in that position till the end of the meditation, when the same rattling sounds would again be heard as the joints were unlocked in the reverse order. Not until this was done could I move or stand up. Sometimes I saw specks of light like a swarm of fireflies before my eyes, at other times a veil of luminous mist would envelop me. Again I would see, with closed as well as open eyes, luminous waves like molten silver pervading everything. Not knowing what these meant, or whether they were helpful or detrimental to my spiritual

¹ A stone image which was set like a sentinel on the parapet of the hall in front of the Kali Temple.

progress, I would lay open my heart to Mother saying, 'Mother, I don't know what these things are. I am ignorant of Mantras and all other things requisite to realization of Thee. Teach me, Mother, how to realize Thee. Who else can help me? Art thou not my only refuge and guide?' This was my earnest prayer night and day. I used to weep bitterly in the extremity of my grief."

Though the young priest was blessed with the vision of his Divine Mother, the goal of his endeavours, yet it did not give him unmixed joy, for it was not continuous. He could get a glimpse of Her only in meditation or through some effort; to him this could only mean one thing—that his realizations were not true, else they would surely be without effort and uninterrupted. Could it be that his thirst after God, intense as it was, was half-hearted? Thoughts such as these made him redouble his efforts and increase his prayers to the Divine Mother.

From this time onward his attitude towards the Mother changed. He became like a little child, confident that his inability to see Her whenever he wished was because She, in a playful mood, was purposely hiding Herself. He felt that, ere long, She would take him in Her arms, that he would no longer be permitted to stray in the labyrinths of the world. He was learning to resign himself to Her will, to check the impulses of his own ego and to let Her will direct him. His self-surrender was complete. "O Mother," he would pray day and night, "I have taken refuge in Thee; teach me what to do or say. Thy will is paramount everywhere and is for the benefit of Thy children. Merge my ego in Thy will and make me Thy instrument." His actions were much criticized. But what was that to him? Was not the Mother leading him by the hand? This material world was fast losing its reality for him, and the presence of the Divine Mother was the only thing he cared for.

As his realization deepened, the vision of the Mother became continuous. Formerly at the time of meditation it was with difficulty that he gained a glimpse of Her beautiful hand, feet, or face; now he saw Her entire form as She spoke to him and directed him in his day's work. Heretofore, while offering food to Her, a luminous ray from Her eyes would touch it, merely taking its essence; now he saw Her partake of the food even before it was offered in the regular way. Formerly he regarded

the stone image of Kali as possessed of consciousness ; now the image disappeared, and in its stead there stood the Living Mother Herself, smiling and blessing him. "I actually felt Her breath on my hand," the Master used to say later on. "At night when the room was lighted, I never saw Her divine form cast any shadow on the walls, even though I looked closely. From my own room I could hear Her going to the upper storey of the temple with the delight of a girl, Her anklets jingling. To see if I were not mistaken, I would follow and find Her standing with flowing hair on the balcony of the first floor, looking either at Calcutta or out over the Ganga."

It was thus that Sri Ramakrishna became a God-intoxicated man. The separation between him and the Divine Mother was gradually vanishing, and he was fast attaining to a state of uninterrupted vision of Hers. And his zeal was commensurate with this great development ; his earnestness overcame all obstacles. He forgot all the formalities of the scriptures in his intimate communion with the Mother. He gave up the elaborate forms of prayer with which the novitiate tries to approach God ; it became instead a ceaseless outpouring of his heart, in a persistent demand to see Her, or a passionate exchange of words with Her. He no longer kept himself at a respectful distance from the image, or approached it with a timid heart, or made prostrations as he entered the temple. Who acts thus with his own mother ? Is she an object of awe to her son ? We cannot establish the sweet filial relation with the Divine Mother—more loving, more affectionate, and more indulgent than any earthly mother can ever be—if we associate the ideas of fear and dreadfulness with Her. As the Mother She is no longer grim and fearful as in Her dance of death, but appears to Her devotees in a majestic, gracious form full of sweetness and love, showering benediction upon all and opening up their understanding.

This was the blessed Mother whom Sri Ramakrishna Deva had realized. Hriday was able to give many interesting details of those days. He used to say, "Whenever one entered the temple, a thrill would be felt, specially when my uncle was worshipping, as though there were a living Presence there. I could never resist the temptation of watching him. His strange manner of worship filled me with wonder and reverence, at the same time

I often questioned his sanity, for his actions were contrary to the injunctions of the Shastras. I was much afraid also of what Rani Rasmani and Mathur Babu would do if the news of his conduct reached them. But Sri Ramakrishna was perfectly insensible to my feelings, and even when told of how strange his actions seemed, was indifferent. Nor could I talk freely as heretofore with him about such matters, for an inexplicable constraint checked me, and I felt a deep gulf between him and me. So I served him as best I could, fearful lest his extraordinary ways should bring on disaster."

Of Sri Ramakrishna's method of worship, he would say, "I noticed that my uncle, taking flowers and Bael leaves in his hand, touched his own head, chest, in fact, the whole body, including the feet, with them and then offered them at the feet of Kali. At other times, with eyes and chest flushed, like a drunkard he would move with tottering steps from his seat to the throne of the goddess, touch her chin as a sign of endearment, and begin to sing, or talk, joke, laugh, or even dance, taking the image by the hand ! Sometimes he would approach the throne with a morsel of food in his hand and putting it to Her lips entreat Her to eat. Then would follow this interesting conversation, 'Well, Thou wishest me to take it—shall I eat now ? Very well, I shall do so !' Then he would eat a portion of it and put the remainder to the mouth of the goddess and say, 'Well, I have eaten—now it is Thy turn.' One day a cat near by was mewling as he was making the food-offering. He tenderly addressed it saying, 'Mother, art Thou eager to eat ? Here, Thou mayst have it,' at the same time giving the food to the cat. Sometimes at the end of the evening service, when he had invoked the Mother to retire, he would say, 'Well, Thou dost wish me to lie down ? Very well, I shall do it,' and would lie for some time on the silver bedstead meant for the Mother. Again, at the time of worship he would become so deeply absorbed in meditation that there would be no sign of external consciousness. Every morning, as he picked the flowers for the Divine Mother's garlands I saw him speaking to, or caressing somebody, or laughing, or indulging in merriment ! He never closed his eyes during the night ; whenever I awoke I found him in exalted mood, talking to someone, singing, or sitting in deep meditation where the Panchavati is now.

All these but confirmed the belief of the local authorities that Sri Ramakrishna must be mad. What they saw amounted to sacrilege. Offering flowers to the Divine Mother after touching one's feet with them, partaking of the food before it was offered to Her, lying in the bedstead of the Mother—not to speak of his weeping, laughing, or talking to the image—were proof enough to them of derangement. Though they thought it unwise to have him in the temple, they could do nothing. So they sent a detailed report about these things to Mathur at Jaun Bazar. Mathur wrote in reply that he would come himself to investigate ; meanwhile there was to be no interference with Sri Ramakrishna's mode of worship. The officials were convinced that as soon as Mathur saw the eccentricities of the young priest, he would dismiss him summarily. Soon after this Mathur paid an unexpected visit to the temple for he feared that some overzealous temple official might maltreat Sri Ramakrishna. He silently entered the Kali temple, when Sri Ramakrishna was worshipping, and was struck with wonder at what he saw. Sri Ramakrishna was putting his whole soul into the worship with no idea that he was being observed. It did not take Mathur long to decide that Sri Ramakrishna's method of worship was the outcome of a genuine and profound love for the Divine Mother, the like of which is seldom encountered. Convinced that the object of building and maintaining the temple—the manifestation of the Mother Herself in the image there—was attained, he returned to his home and sent an order the next day to the temple superintendent that the young priest was to have freedom to worship in any way he chose, and that he was not to be molested.

Mention is made in the scriptures of two kinds of devotion. In one, man worships God in accordance with the injunctions laid down in the Shastras. He bathes so many times a day, observes fasts, uses this or that Mantra, waves lights in a certain fashion, and lays the greatest stress on the various disciplines prescribed by the scriptures. In the other kind of devotion one does not observe any such forms ; one feels such intimacy with God, is so near to Him that one forgets all rules and regulations and acts according to the promptings of the heart. The first kind of devotion (Bhakti) is called Vaidhi-Bhakti, the second is known as Prema-Bhakti. The former is the stepping stone to

the latter. One is blessed with Prema-Bhakti only when one's devotion to God is mature, the outcome of following the course laid down in the scriptures. It is thus apparent that the phenomenal changes in the mental outlook of Sri Ramakrishna which the ignorant ascribed to insanity, were due to the development of Prema-Bhakti. It was "the state of being blasted by an excess of Light." This transformation came in such a natural way that Sri Ramakrishna himself was scarcely conscious of it. He felt himself completely at the mercy of a tremendous force. He often wondered at his own conduct and questioned if he were on the right track. Hence we find him going to the Kali temple and weeping before the Mother, seeking Her advice. As we shall see, his trust in Her was never betrayed.

Owing to the great strain of God-realization his body became subject to various ailments. One of these was a burning sensation over the entire body, as if his skin had been painted with a caustic. He described it thus later on: "At the time of worship I tried to think according to the directions of the Shastras that the sinner in me was burnt, and that I was pure and perfect. Who knew then that in every one there actually lies hidden a personification of evil that can be destroyed? I began to feel a burning sensation in my body from the beginning of my Sadhana period. What might this be?—I thought. Medicines were administered, but all proved futile. One day I was practising in the Panchavati grove, when a red-eyed man of a black colour came out of this body, reeling as if drunk and began to walk about in front of me. Shortly after, there emerged from my body another human figure of a placid mien, wearing the ochre robe and holding a trident in his hand. He attacked the former and killed him. A few days after that vision, I was relieved of the burning sensation which had tormented me for six months." As we shall see, he had two recurrences of this sensation later.

The scriptures dealing with devotion lay down five different methods of worship. The first is Shanta—the placid attitude of mind towards the Divinity cultivated by certain ascetics and anchorites who, having learnt from the Vedas and other sources that God resides in the heart of every one, withdraw their senses from the objects of the world and concentrate their minds on Him as the only reality and the innermost Self of the universe.

These sages live far from the turmoil of the world and lead a simple, retired life, eating roots or fruits. There is generally a tinge of Jnana¹ in this form of worship. The Vedic Rishis are examples of this kind of devotion. The next way is called Dasya on the relation of servant to master. Reflection on the complex scheme of the universe naturally leads to the conception of a Lord, with infinite power, knowledge, and mercy, governing in accordance with fixed laws. Many desirous of pleasing this God with loyal service, give up all considerations of personal comfort for His sake, thinking to establish thus the relationship of master and servant. The devotion of Hanuman, the monkey-god, for Sri Ramachandra is an example. He is regarded as the model of faithful service. The third way is by Sakhya or friendship. The devotee looks upon his Chosen Ideal as his dearest friend, feels no constraint in his presence, and is satisfied with simply making his friend happy. Arjuna and the cowherd boys of Vrindaban regarded Krishna thus. The fourth method is known as Vatsalya or the relationship between parent and child. There is no element of awe in it, for the devotee looks upon the deity as his own child, and considers himself stronger than the object of his love. The parents of Sri Krishna are cases in point. Lastly, there is Madhura or the relationship which exists between two lovers. This is the most intense form of attachment, in which the least idea of separation is unbearable. The Gopis of Vrindaban are examples. God in this form of Sadhana, is one's sweetheart, a part and parcel, as it were, of one's very being. It is higher than all the foregoing modes of worship and includes them all.

Sri Ramakrishna passed through all these phases of devotion, realizing the same goal through every one. His Dasya Sadhana, which we shall describe in detail is particularly interesting in that through his endeavours to enact the role of Hanuman, he was blessed with the vision of Sita, the divine consort of Rama.

It was shortly after his vision of Kali that his attention was directed to Rama, the king of Ayodhya, who is regarded as an incarnation of the Lord Himself. Convinced that the quickest way to realize Him would be to become thoroughly imbued with

¹ Monism.

the spirit of His greatest devotee, Hanuman, he took upon himself the task of reproducing as faithfully as possible Hanuman's attitude towards Rama—that of the faithful servant towards the master. The following are his own words about the process and results of this form of practice: "By constant meditation on the glorious character of Hanuman I totally forgot my own identity. My daily life and style of food came to resemble those of Hanuman. I did not feign them, they came naturally to me. I tied my cloth round the waist, letting a portion of it hang down in the form of a tail, and jumped from place to place instead of walking. I lived on fruits and roots only, and these I preferred to eat without peeling. I passed most of the time on trees, calling out in a solemn voice, 'Raghuvir !' My eyes looked restless like those of a monkey, and most wonderful of all, my coccyx enlarged by about an inch. It gradually resumed its former size after that phase of the mind had passed on the completion of that course of discipline. In short, everything about me was more like a monkey than a human being."

At the end of this Sadhana he had a wonderful vision, so exceedingly vivid and so different from any of his previous ones, that it remained long in his memory. Referring to it the Master said, "One day I was seated in the place now known as Panchavati in quite a normal state of mind—not at all entranced—when all of a sudden a luminous female figure of exquisite grace appeared before me. The place was illumined with her lustre. I perceived not her alone, but also the trees, the Ganga and everything. I observed that it was a human figure, being without such divine characteristics as three eyes and so on. But such a sublime countenance, expressive of love, sorrow, compassion, and fortitude, is not commonly met with even in goddesses. Slowly she advanced from the north towards me, looking graciously on me all the while. I was amazed and was wondering who she might be, when a monkey with a cry suddenly jumped and sat by her. Then the idea flashed within me that this must be Sita, whose whole life had been centred in Rama and who had misery only as her lot ! In an excess of emotion I was about to fall at her feet crying, 'Mother,' when she entered into my body, with the significant remark that the smile on her lips she bequeathed unto me ! I fell unconscious on the ground, overpowered with emotion. This was the first vision I had with

eyes wide open, without meditation on anything. Is it because my first vision of Sita was of her grief-stricken aspect, that my subsequent life contained so much suffering? Who knows!"

The secret of his success in these diverse Sadhanas (it must be remembered that it takes the ordinary person many lives to achieve the goal of even one form of Sadhana) was—in one word—sincerity, a complete correspondence between thought and action—an entire absence of duplicity. Sri Ramakrishna used to say that for success in any pursuit one must live exactly up to one's ideal. As we proceed further we shall see how he carried it out in his own life.

In the foregoing pages we have narrated certain events in the life of Sri Ramakrishna which may seem impossible or supernatural, so difficult are they of explanation from the standpoint of reason or science. But they cannot be as lightly dismissed as that. All saints and sages, of every age and clime, claim to have had experiences inexplicable by reason, and up to the present at least, by science. At the same time none of them has said that his visions or extraordinary powers were beyond Nature or the reach of the rest of mankind—on the contrary, all have invited the rest of the world to test these experiences by experiment along the same lines, to demonstrate for themselves that they are as much within the realm of Nature as any of the phenomena of physical science. The only difference is in the degree of subtlety. Physical science deals with the comparatively gross manifestations of Nature, while religion—which is philosophy made practical—deals with its finer forms. If after patient and sincere research these transcendental experiences are found to be untrue, then alone have the right to reject them and the authority to pronounce them delusions been won. Here we would like to emphasise the fact that these visions are not in any way necessary for religious progress, nor are they the *sine qua non* of divine realization. The highest spiritual experiences may and often do come unattended by them. At best, they are but milestones on the path of religious progress, of importance in proportion as they make a man purer, stronger, more loving, and more self-sacrificing. The right vision is that which transforms a fool into a sage; where contrary results are produced, we have only delusion.

We have seen that Rani Rasmani was attracted to Sri

Ramakrishna. Convinced that he had been blessed with the vision of the Divine Mother, she felt that his strange behaviour bespoke the fullness of devotion, rather than any mental derangement. One day she came to Dakshineswar and after bathing in the Ganga entered the temple to worship and meditate. She took a seat near the Divine Mother. Sri Ramakrishna was there, and the Rani, according to her usual custom, requested him to sing. Sri Ramakrishna agreed and filled the place with the ecstasy of his songs. After a time, noticing that the Rani was inattentive, he exclaimed, "That anxiety even here!" and slapped her twice. The temple servants were confounded, but none dared to punish the offender. The only two people who were calm were Sri Ramakrishna and Rani Rasmani. His attitude was that of a father chastising an indiscreet child, while the Rani was abashed as if caught in some naughtiness. She was amazed to find that the young priest had the power to perceive that her mind was preoccupied with a pending lawsuit rather than with the songs of devotion. Realizing the gravity of the situation, and apprehensive that the temple-staff might assume the right of punishing Sri Ramakrishna, she gravely forbade them to ever mention the incident to him.

Rasmani retired to her room. When her attendants complained of Sri Ramakrishna's insolence towards her, she answered, "You do not understand it; the Divine Mother Herself punished me and thus illumined my heart."

There is a great deal of significance in the above incident. It shows that Sri Ramakrishna considered himself only a tool in the hands of the Divine Mother. Had he had any other idea, he would not have dared to run the risk of jeopardising his position in the temple by insulting the Rani. It also throws a flood of light on the Rani's mentality allowing us to see the deep spiritual vein in her nature which made her recognize the justice of the rebuke and accept it cheerfully.

One day about this time Sri Ramakrishna in the presence of Mathur made Hriday his substitute saying that the Divine Mother would be as well pleased if thenceforth Hriday conducted the worship. Mathur took this to be as the will of the Mother and agreed to it cheerfully.

We have already mentioned the Panchavati,¹ the place where Sri Ramakrishna used to meditate. There was a small tank near by, which was soon after re-excavated, and the surplus earth was utilised in filling up the pits about this place. The Amalaka tree was sacrificed to this change. One day Sri Ramakrishna proposed to Hriday to build a suitable place for his spiritual practices. Hriday agreed and chose a spot near the Master's old place of Sadhana, where the latter himself planted an Ashwattha tree, and Hriday planted four others. Then a hedge of Tulasi and Aparajita plants was planted, which soon grew thick and tall enough to hide the place from the view of passers-by. One day some cattle destroyed the hedge and injured the young plants ; this made Sri Ramakrishna anxious to protect it against further attacks. It is said that soon after a strong flood-tide in the Ganga brought to the bank near the temple a bundle of wooden posts, with rope, a bill-hook and everything necessary for a fence.

We have already seen that Mathur always looked after Sri Ramakrishna's comfort and saw that no harm came to him from people who did not understand his mental state. But even he began to suspect that there might be some nervous trouble. The incident of his slapping Rani Rasmani strengthened this suspicion. So he arranged for Sri Ramakrishna's treatment by an expert physician, Kaviraj Ganga Prasad Sen of Calcutta. The treatment, though continued for some time, brought no relief. Mathur also tried to persuade Sri Ramakrishna to keep his feelings within bounds and to regulate his life in accordance with fixed standards. One day he said, "God too must abide by his own laws. He has no power to transcend them." "What an absurd proposition !" replied Sri Ramakrishna, "One who has made a law can repeal it at pleasure or make a new law in its place." "How can that be ?" said Mathur, "A plant that produces only red flowers cannot produce flowers of any other colour—white, for instance, for such is the law. I should like to see God produce white flowers from a plant bearing only red flowers." "That, too, He can easily do," answered Sri Ramakrishna, "for everything depends on His will." Mathur was not convinced. The next day, in the temple garden, Sri Ramakrishna

¹ It means a cluster of five sacred trees. Such a place is considered very holy and helpful to meditation. The five trees are Ashwattha, Bael, Amalaka, Ashoka, and Vata or the banyan.

came across a China-rose plant with two flowers on the same stalk, one of which was red and the other snow-white. He broke off the branch to show it to Mathur. As Mathur came in closer touch with Sri Ramakrishna, his doubts gave way to a growing conviction that here was a most remarkable man, a perfected sage, association with whom would confer untold blessings. He was coming under the magic spell of this strange man of realization, and inwardly began to look up to him as a Guru. We shall presently see how this feeling of regard deepened into an absolute self-surrender at the feet of the humble priest of Dakshineswar. We shall conclude the account of this brilliant period in the life of Sri Ramakrishna by mentioning a few more incidents which happened during these four years (1855-1858) of his Sadhana.

Though Sri Ramakrishna during this period of divine madness could not bear association with worldly men, he did not shun the companionship of devotees. On the contrary, he was eager to be with them and join in their worship and Kirtana. Now and then he would go to Baranagore to visit the Dashamahavidya, or to Kalighat to worship the Divine Mother, and participated almost every year in the greatest religious festivity of Panihati, a few miles from Dakshineswar. It was in this latter place that Vaishnav Charan, son of Utsavananda Goswami and a great Vaishnava devotee of the time, first met Sri Ramakrishna. It was in the year 1858 Sri Ramakrishna attended by Hriday had gone to witness the festival and was seated in the temple of Mani Mohan Sen, when Vaishnav Charan arrived and immediately recognized Sri Ramakrishna as a man of rare spirituality. After a little while he offered five Rupees to Sri Ramakrishna, who refused to accept them. Vaishnav Charan being insistent Sri Ramakrishna told Hriday to accept the money and to buy mangoes and other things for offering with it. Then they all began to sing Kirtana, encircling Sri Ramakrishna, who fell into a trance. Vaishnava Charan tried to make Sri Ramakrishna eat of the offerings, but he could not swallow; the remainder was eaten by all as sacred Prasad. On the way back to Calcutta Vaishnav Charan, who had ascertained where Sri Ramakrishna lived, stopped at Dakshineswar to see him, but he was not there. A few years later, he met Sri Ramakrishna again, and, as we shall see, under exceedingly interesting circumstances.

At this time Sri Ramakrishna had to undergo an ordeal which Rani Rasmani and Mathur engineered rather thoughtlessly, although in good faith. They were greatly concerned at his failing health and thought that deviation from the rigid observance of continence might be beneficial. They knew that any such proposal would be rejected with scorn. So they contrived to tempt him secretly. Accordingly they hired two women of ill fame to enter the room at Dakshineswar and tempt this child of the Divine Mother. The moment he saw them, with all earnestness he sought shelter at the feet of the Mother. Hearing the name of Mother the women were abashed. Another day Mathur took Sri Ramakrishna for a drive to Calcutta and stopped at a house in Mechuabazar, where several beautiful girls were waiting. He retired leaving Sri Ramakrishna alone with them. Instantly Sri Ramakrishna became like a child, lost outward consciousness in repeating the name of Mother, and remained in that marvellous state—the very embodiment of purity and self-control. The effect of this on the minds of the girls was electric. They realized their folly, and afraid of the consequences of trying to tempt a saint, they implored his forgiveness. When Mathur, attracted by the noise, entered the room, he was struck dumb at this astonishing proof of Sri Ramakrishna's mastery over his passions, and as he hastened him from the scene, he met with a volley of reproaches from the infuriated agents of his design. He was smitten with shame, and needless to say, his regard for Sri Ramakrishna was redoubled.

HALADHARI

At this time there came to Dakshineswar another man who was to be closely connected with the life of Sri Ramakrishna for a period of eight years. His name was Ramtarak, or more familiarly Haladhari, who lived at Dakshineswar probably from 1858 to 1866. He was a cousin of Sri Ramakrishna, being the eldest son of Khudiram's youngest brother. He came to Dakshineswar in search of employment, and Mathur, knowing him to be related to Sri Ramakrishna, was glad to engage him in the worship of Mother Kali till his cousin recovered from his divine madness. Haladhari was well versed in the *Shrimad-Bhagavata* and *Adhyatma Ramayana*, and was a master of the Gita and Vedanta. Though a devotee of Vishnu, he undertook, at the request of Mathur, to worship Kali. As he insisted on cooking his own food on the bank of the Ganga, Mathur remarked, "Why are you so particular? Sri Ramakrishna and your nephew Hriday do not object to taking the food offered to the Divine Mother." To this Haladhari replied, "My cousin has attained a certain state of realization, and he can do so. But as I have not yet reached that state, in my case it would be a sin." Mathur was pleased at this straightforward answer and allowed him to do as he pleased.

Haladhari could not bear to see the animal sacrifice in the Kali temple. After nearly a month's service he was meditating one evening, when Kali appeared to him and told him to leave the temple, and that as a result of his half-hearted worship he would soon lose his son. Shortly afterwards, Haladhari's son died. After telling the entire circumstances to Sri Ramakrishna he took up the service of Radhakanta instead.

Haladhari belonged to that degraded cult of the Vaishnavas which trying to practise the Madhura Bhava in its extreme form, does so not through meditation as it should, but through secret relations with women. The matter soon leaked out, and people began to whisper about it among themselves, though none dared to accuse him publicly lest he should curse them, and there was a current belief that his curse always came true. When, however, the news reached the ears of Sri Ramakrishna, he in

his outspoken manner spoke to Haladhari of what was being said about him and his practices. This infuriated Haladhari, who said, "You are my cousin and younger, and yet you dare to slight me thus ! As a punishment for this, blood will come out of your mouth." Though Sri Ramakrishna tried to appease him, saying that his object in warning him was to save him from criticism, Haladhari remained unmoved and did not retract his words.

Now that the Kali temple and its accommodations became known, many Sadhus used Dakshineswar as a halting place on their way to Gangasagar. It is probable that from some one of these Sri Ramakrishna learnt the secrets of Hatha-Yoga, which he now practised. One evening soon after the above incident, he felt an irritating sensation in his palate, which after a minute began to bleed. Sri Ramakrishna described the incident: "The colour of the blood was dark like the juice of bean leaves. It was so thick that only a little portion fell to the ground and the rest clotted and hung like a rope from my teeth. I pressed one end of my cloth against the place to stop the bleeding, but without success. I was sorely perplexed. Many people gathered round me. Haladhari, too came in all haste from his evening services. I told him weeping, 'See, cousin, what you have done to me by your curse.' Seeing me in such a plight he, too, began to weep. Fortunately, at that time there was staying in the Kali temple a Sadhu who, hearing of the incident, came and examined the colour of the blood and the place from which it came. He said, 'Thank God ! There is no cause for anxiety. This haemorrhage has done you great good. I see you were practising Yoga. This opened your Sushumna canal and a quantity of blood was rushing to the head. It is excellent that this blood, instead of reaching the brain, made a passage through the palate ; or you would have entered the Jada Samadhi¹ from which you could never again come down to the plane of ordinary consciousness. It must be that the Divine Mother has some great mission to be done through you, and She has saved your body.' I was reassured by his words and was at peace."

Being an orthodox Brahmin, with great respect for the traditions of the Chatterjee family, Haladhari could not bring

¹ Another name for Nirvikalpa Samadhi--the highest form of concentration mentioned in the Yoga-Shastra.

himself to justify the peculiar ways of Sri Ramakrishna. Though he lived with his cousin during the stormiest period of his Sadhana, yet being book-bound, he grossly misunderstood his cousin's exalted spiritual state and naturally concluded, like other people, that his actions were more the outcome of a deranged brain than of any spiritual realization. Not having the breadth of vision which would enable him to look at things in their proper perspective, he would sometimes say to Hriday, "Look here, Hriday, it is really a blot on Ramakrishna's character that he has given up the sacred thread. Again, is it not awkward that he should remain naked before all? It is exceptionally good fortune to be born a Brahmin. Yet you see how Ramakrishna slights this rare privilege! I don't see that he has attained to such a high state of spiritual exaltation that he can afford to make light of the caste observances so recklessly. He does not take anybody's advice, excepting yours to a certain extent. You ought to see that his actions are more orthodox. In my opinion, you should use force even to prevent him from repeating these profanities."

But at times his ideas about Sri Ramakrishna would change. If perchance he were present when the Master was in the sanctum of the Divine Mother, he would be struck at the sight of his cousin's unique devotion and earnestness and passionate prayers. Seeing this divine fervour—a thing of which he had had no experience in spite of his book-learning—Haladhari would revise his opinions and find an excuse for the inconsistencies. Then he would run to Hriday and say "Ah, you must have seen something divine in Ramakrishna otherwise how could you serve him with such constancy? Hriday—a somewhat changed man now—would answer with a smile, "Yes, you are right, uncle. Don't you see, I could not bring myself to serve others in such menial ways?"

So Haladhari was tossed between doubt and partial conviction regarding his cousin's state of mind. Sri Ramakrishna used to say, "Many a time Haladhari being struck by my devotion and zeal would say 'Ramakrishna, this time I have found you out.' I would retort, 'Take care that you do not get confused again.' 'You cannot deceive me any more,' he would reply, 'surely the Lord is manifesting Himself through you.' I would smile and say, 'Let us hope so—we live and learn.' But while

studying in leisure hours some such book as the *Bhagavata* or the *Adhyatma Ramayana* with the occasional stimulation of snuff, he would again be inflated with pride. Throwing all humility to the winds, he would assume an air of great superiority, look at the world as a mere mud-puddle, arrogate to himself the position of a great scholar, and thrust his opinions upon all. Sometimes I went to him and said, 'What you have read in the scriptures, I have realized in life. So I can understand the import of the Shastras.' Haladhari would flare up and reply in a swaggering tone, 'Go to, you are an egregious fool. That you should say that you understand these abstruse things !' I would reply, 'Believe me, the Divinity that you acknowledged to be residing in me teaches me everything.' At this Haladhari would become frantic with rage and reply, 'How foolish ! What scripture teaches that God would incarnate Himself again in this Kali-Yuga except when He comes in the person of Kalki ? You have verily become insane, or how could you entertain such thoughts ?' I would remind him with a smile, 'Why, did you not say a few hours ago that there would be no further confusion in your mind about me ?' But Haladhari would not be in the mood to listen to it then. We had many repetitions of this amusing scene. Then one day, as he saw me sitting naked on a branch of the banyan tree in the Panchavati, he was thoroughly convinced that I had been possessed by a Brahmadaitya !"¹

Haladhari, we have said, was a Vaishnava, and ever since the death of his child through the curse of Kali he came to look upon that goddess as being of a Tamasika or dire nature. One day he even remarked to Sri Ramakrishna, "Can one get spiritual elevation by worshipping a Tamasika form ? Why do you bestow so much attention on the worship of Kali ?" Sri Ramakrishna did not answer him then ; but he was pained at the disrespect shown to his favourite Deity. He at once went to the Kali temple and asked the Divine Mother with tearful eyes, "Mother, Haladhari is a scholar, versed in the scriptures, and he says Thou art possessed of 'Tamasika attributes. Art Thou really so ?' The Mother Herself enlightened him on the point. With a heart full of joy he ran to Haladhari who was engaged in the

¹ A Brahmin earth-bound for some reason for a period after death.

worship of Radhakanta. Excited, he at once climbed on his shoulders and exclaimed again and again: "Dare you call my Mother Tamasika ! Is She ? No. She is everything. She has all the three Gunas ; again She is full of Sattva alone !" Sri Ramakrishna's divine touch illumined Haladhari's heart—the scales fell, as it were, from his eyes. In a moment he understood the folly of his remarks—realized his own littleness. He bowed his head in reverent submission, found in Sri Ramakrishna the manifestation of the Mother of the universe, and taking flowers and sandal-paste, made an offering at his holy feet. Shortly after, Hriday met him and asked how it was that he stooped to worship Sri Ramakrishna—specially as he believed him to be insane and possessed by an evil spirit. "Oh, I can't tell you how," replied Haladhari, "On returning from the Kali temple he overwhelmed me altogether. I forgot everything and saw in him the clear manifestation of divinity ! Whenever I visit him in the Kali temple, he has that kind of influence over me. Really it is a mystery which I cannot solve." So in rare moments of illumination Haladhari saw divinity in his cousin, but he forgot this when he went back to his books.

Haladhari's conduct confirms the truth of the Master's statement that books are but "knots on the heart"—they stifle our cravings for God-realization. The reader already knows that beggars used to be fed at the Kali temple. One day Sri Ramakrishna—like the true Vedantin that he was—ate a little of their leavings, considering these poor people as veritable representations of the Lord. When Haladhari saw him doing so, he, being an orthodox man, was upset and said, "What are you doing ? You have lost caste. Now who will marry your daughters in future ?" These incongruous words from the lips of a professed Vedantin like Haladhari roused the indignation of Sri Ramakrishna, who exclaimed, "You rogue ! Do you not always quote from the scriptures to say that the world is an illusion and God is the only reality, and glibly recommend people to look upon all beings as Brahman ? And you think that I like you would preach that the world is a myth and at the same time have children ? Fie upon your knowledge of the scriptures !"

One day Haladhari cast aspersions on the truth of Sri Ramakrishna's God-visions and said on the authority of the scriptures that God is beyond the reach of the human mind. That gave

rise to grave doubts in the mind of Sri Ramakrishna. He thus described his feelings and the subsequent experience to one of his disciples, Swami Premananda: "I asked myself the question: Are the various divine visions which I have had and the words I have heard from the lips of the Mother Herself all false? Have they been mere fancies of my mind? Is it that I have been fooled by the Divine Mother? To me the very thought ^{was} painful and blasphemous. I was greatly perplexed. With ^{other} sobs I prayed to the Mother: 'How couldst Thou have the heart to deceive me like that because I was a fool?' A stream of tears flowed from my eyes. Shortly after I saw something like a volume of mist rising from the floor and filling the space before me. In the midst of it appeared a fair face, calm and highly expressive, with a flowing beard. Fixing its steady gaze upon me the figure solemnly said, 'Well remain on the threshold of relative consciousness!' Repeating this thrice the face gently disappeared in the mist, which also dissolved. This vision reassured me."

Another day such a doubt—and that, too, owing to the confusing arguments of Haladhari—crossed his mind. On that occasion, too, the Master, as he sat down to worship, begged of the Mother to dissolve it. She appeared before him in the form of a certain woman known as Rati's mother, beside the sacred jar used in worship and repeated the same words.¹ A third time he heard the same voice after he had come down from the state of Nirvikalpa Samadhi. But of this later.

¹ The events described in this chapter were scattered over a period of eight years.

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RETURN TO KAMARPUKUR AND
MARRIAGE

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Misfortunes seldom come singly. Chandra Devi had already experienced many. She had hardly recovered from the pangs of bereavement for her eldest son, when the news reached her at Kamarpukur that Gadadhar, her youngest and dearest son, had given up worship and all other duties in the Dakshineswar temple and was behaving to all intents and purposes like a madman. She heard that he shunned company and frequented lonely places, and that his every act bespoke insanity. Naturally the news made Chandra Devi as well as Rameshwar extremely anxious. They ascribed this malady to nervous prostration, symptoms of which, they thought, had been manifested during his boyhood and youth by his trances. Chandra again and again wrote to Dakshineswar asking Sri Ramakrishna to come to Kamarpukur, where under her maternal care and in the salubrious climate of the country his strained nerves might be soothed and his health regained. Sri Ramakrishna obeyed the call. The anxious mother found him restless, and indifferent to the affairs of the world, with a veil of sorrow and gloom overshadowing his once bright face. He was no longer attracted by anything agreeable ; his former companions and friends were of no more interest to him ; and the village of Kamarpukur, which once seemed so lovely and picturesque, appeared now dull and commonplace. His buoyancy had left him, and in its stead there was pain and anguish of mind—manifested in his weeping and the frequent calls for "Mother". Poor Chandra was totally upset. She did not know the cause of this new illness, and all her attempts to console her dear son proved futile. In conjunction with medicine, various occult cures were tried ; religious rites were performed to avert any probable disaster ; and exorcists were consulted to pronounce on his case. Notwithstanding all these efforts, Sri Ramakrishna was at times overwhelmed with the same feelings as those of the Dakshineswar days when he was struggling to obtain a vision of the Divine Mother. The agonising burning sensations of Dakshineswar were repeated. Never before had the people of Kamarpukur

marked in him such great zeal for God, such absence of fear, such indifference to everything worldly, such determination to surmount every obstacle that stood in the way of attaining his goal.

Chandra Devi in her anxiety consulted an expert exorcist. The Master told of this later: "One day an exorcist came and gave me some charmed water to smell, saying that if I were under the influence of an evil spirit, it would instantly leave me. But the experiment was a sad failure. Then with the help of some specialists a spirit was invoked. It said to the exorcists present that I was neither under the influence of any spirit, nor had I been suffering from any illness. Then it warned me against using too much betel-nut, since I wanted to be a Sadhu. Really I was very fond of it, but I gave it up after this admonition."

We have already said that there are two cremation grounds at Kamarpukur. These are generally shunned by the villagers even at day-time as haunted places. Consequently they are very lonely and as such exceedingly fit for spiritual exercises. Being places where the last vestige of the human body is dropped, not only do they always remind one of the evanescence of this world and all its enjoyments, but at the same time automatically turn one's mind to thoughts of God and the other world. Hence cremation grounds have in India always been invested with a sort of unique holiness, and they are often selected as places for meditation, specially by the Tantrika Sadhakas. It is the favourite abode of Kali, the all-destroying Mother of the universe, and devotees believe that by practising in such sacred places they will reach their cherished goal sooner.

Sri Ramakrishna intended to practise stern 'Tapasya' and chose one of those places for this purpose. He began to spend whole days and a great part of every night there in worship and meditation. Gradually his relatives and neighbours came to know of this and of his many extraordinary visions while meditating there. The anxious mother often sent Rameshwar to call him back. Rameshwar dared not approach the place and called him from a distance.

A few months' stay at Kamarpukur did Sri Ramakrishna much good, and he recovered his normal state of mind. His

restlessness subsided, and he ceased to weep. It is not difficult to divine the cause of this, for from his own utterances and from the testimony of his relatives we can infer that, as a result of his strenuous Sadhana, he must have had visions of the Divine Mother again.

His mother and relatives were greatly relieved. Of course he had certain peculiarities yet, such as passing much time in the cremation ground, sitting naked while worshipping or meditating, manifesting annoyance if disturbed at devotions, and showing a particular fondness for spiritual pursuits; but these had been characteristic of him.

Sri Ramakrishna was now twenty-three years of age, and he was as indifferent as ever to all worldly concerns. His mother and brother began to plan to interest him in domestic affairs. Their first thought was, naturally, of marriage—a tie which he could not disregard. Once married, his mind would not soar so high, and the responsibility of maintaining a family would soon, they thought, steady him. So they began to search for a bride, and blamed themselves for not having thought earlier of this solution for their troubles.

Messengers were sent to the neighbouring villages in search of a bride, but with no success. According to the prevalent custom of society, it was impossible for them to secure a girl of the type they desired, without a proper dowry; and they were too poor for that. The search was vigorously continued, but with no better result. This threw Chandra Devi and Rameshwar into despair. Gadadhar had purposely been kept in the dark about these negotiations lest he should take them amiss. But he was too clever for them. He was not long in discovering the whole plot; but far from thwarting it, he seemed to welcome the idea. He made merry as boys do at the prospect of some happy incident in the family. Was it because he already knew that such was the Divine Mother's dispensation, or was it in mere spirit of fun? Though the average person may take the latter view, we have weighty reasons to believe that the former hypothesis alone was true.

Sri Ramakrishna found his mother and brother in a dejected state, and inquiring into the matter learnt that their failure to get a bride for him was the cause of their worry. At this he said in a semi-conscious mood, "It is useless to try

here and there. Go to Jayrambati,¹ and there you will find the bride providentially reserved² for me in the house of Ram Chandra Mukhopadhyaya." Though his mother and brother did not attach much importance to this statement, they sent a man to that village, who returned with the report that it was true that Ram Chandra had a girl, but though she might otherwise be a good match for Sri Ramakrishna, she was too young, being only five years old. But Chandra agreed to accept the girl as no other bride was available. Everything was settled in a few days, an auspicious day was fixed for the ceremony, and Sri Ramakrishna was married to the girl,³ whose name was Saradamani Devi. Rameshwar had to pay a dowry of three hundred rupees.

After the ceremony was over Chandra Devi was greatly comforted. She firmly believed that the marriage would be good for Sri Ramakrishna ; and she was glad that her "mad" son had gone through the ceremony cheerfully. But her happiness was marred a little by a trifling incident. Being poor, she had borrowed some ornaments from her friends in the Laha family and with them bedecked the bride on the night of the marriage. When, a few days later, the time came for returning those ornaments, she had not the heart to take them from the unsuspecting girl. She was thinking over the matter, when Sri Ramakrishna said he would look to it. When the young wife was asleep, he took those ornaments from her so cleverly that she did not know it. The ornaments were sent back to the Laha family. The girl on awakening complained that her ornaments were missing. Chandra Devi took her in arms and comforted her with tearful eyes saying, "My darling, Gadadhar will give you better ornaments hereafter." The girl's uncle who had come to see her that day was much displeased at this incident and took her home at once. All this pained Chandra Devi very much ; but Sri Ramakrishna said jokingly, "Whatever they may say or do now, they cannot annul the marriage any way !"

After his marriage Sri Ramakrishna stayed at Kamarpukur

¹ A village three miles to the north-west of Kamarpukur.

² The expression he used was characteristic. He said, "Marked as it were with a straw." The reference is to the custom among rural people of reserving the best fruit for offering unto the Lord. To distinguish it, they tie a piece of straw round it.

³ Of course, it is understood that this was really a betrothal ceremony.

for about a year and a half. Chandra Devi would not allow him to leave her until he was completely cured, for she feared that he might have a relapse. Once during this period he went to his father-in-law's house and after a few day's stay there brought his bride home. He was becoming anxious to return to Dakshineswar to resume his work there. The poverty at home must have urged him to do so. Taking leave of his mother and brother he set out for Dakshineswar.

BACK TO DAKSHINESWAR

On his return to Dakshineswar Sri Ramakrishna again took charge of the worship of the Divine Mother, but after a few days he was seized anew with the madness of God-realization. The aged mother, the struggling brother, the young wife, the pecuniary condition of the family, all were forgotten in this desire for the vision of the Divine Mother. The same meditation and prayer day and night, the same flushing of the chest, the same painful, burning sensation all over the body, the same repugnance to worldly matters, and the same insomnia reappeared. But having experienced them once, he was not worried by them now.

Mathur and others became anxious, thinking that he had a relapse, and placed him again under the treatment of Kaviraj Ganga Prasad Sen, but as before with no results. Hriday took him regularly to the Kaviraj. One day another physician¹ of East Bengal was present when Sri Ramakrishna came. When he heard the particulars of the case he said, "It appears from the symptoms that this is a case of divine madness, the after-effect of some Yogic practices, and medicines will be of no use." Sri Ramakrishna himself said later on that this was the first physician to diagnose the true nature of his case. But nobody attached any importance to this statement at the time. Mathur and others went on trying new methods of treatment for Sri Ramakrishna in spite of which the symptoms were gradually aggravating.

The news of his illness slowly filtered to Kamarpukur. The anguish of Chandra Devi can better be imagined than described. Finding no other way, she resolved to invoke the blessings of God through personal austerities. The Lord Shiva of Kamarpukur was famed for fulfilling the desires of His devotees. Chandra Devi repaired to His temple, determined to remain there without food and water until the gracious Lord granted her prayer. In a vision she was directed to approach the Shiva of Mukundapur, who would answer her prayer. Chandra faithfully obeyed the injunction. She had starved and prayed for a

¹ Some say that it was Durga Prasad Sen, brother of Ganga Prasad.

couple of days, when the great God appeared to her in a dream and said, "Do not be afraid, your son is not mad. He is simply passing through a state of God-realization." The anxious mother was consoled and thanking the Lord returned home.

It was a momentous period in the life of Sri Ramakrishna. He was athirst day and night for the Divine Mother. "O Mother, have pity on me, reveal Thyself to Thy unworthy son. I do not want comfort, nor do I hanker after wealth or prestige. I only want Thee and Thee alone"—was his constant cry.

Referring to this state, Sri Ramakrishna often said afterwards, "No sooner was one state transcended than another took its place. Before that whirlwind, the sacred thread was blown away. Not only that, even the wearing cloth hardly remained. Sometimes I would open my mouth—the jaws touching as it were the heavens and the nether worlds—and earnestly cry, 'Mother!'—thinking I must pull Her like a fisherman hauling fish with a drag-net. Oh, through what states of mind I passed in those days! Everyone thought I was mad. A slight stimulus from outside stirred the depths of my spiritual consciousness. Even a street girl appeared to me as Sita, going to greet her victorious husband. One day I saw an English lad standing cross-legged against a tree. Immediately the thought of Krishna was suggested to my mind, and I went into deep meditation. At one time I would roam in the temple premises with a bamboo on my shoulder. At another time I would feed a dog and eat the leavings. The idea of caste lost all meaning for me. A low-caste man sent me a curry cooked by his wife, which I ate with relish. In the Panchavati I would sit in deep meditation with my body perfectly still—losing all consciousness of the outside world. At that time, for want of proper care, my hair was matted. Birds would perch on my head and peck the grains of rice left there during the time of worship. Often snakes would crawl over my motionless body—and neither I nor the snakes knew it. Oh, what visions flitted past my eyes, day and night!"

About his wonderful experiences of this period he said, "As I sat down to meditate, I would find a Sannyasin emerging from my body with a trident in hand and directing me to concentrate my mind on God, leaving aside all other thoughts. He threatened to plunge his weapon into my body if I did not

do so. When the Papa-Purusha (the personification of sin) came out of my body, it was the same Sannyasin who killed him. When I wished to see some deities in distant places or participate in religious chantings held far off, I would see this shining figure step out of my body, go along a luminous path to those places, and re-enter my body after fulfilling the particular desires."

On another occasion he said, "A young Sannyasin exactly resembling me would come out of my body and instruct me in all matters. At those times I might retain a little outward consciousness, but more often I lost it completely in my absorption in watching the movements of this strange person. When he re-entered this body, I recovered my normal state.

"The ordinary man could not have borne a fraction of that tremendous fervour, his body would have shattered by a quarter of that emotion. I could forget my indescribable pangs only by seeing the Mother in some form or other for the greater part of the day and night. Otherwise this body could not have survived. For six years these eyes remained wide open, not a wink of sleep visited them. I could not close the eyelids, however much I might try to do so. I had no idea of time, nor of the body. When the mind, at rare intervals, came down to a lower plane and I had a faint idea of the body, a shudder of pain would pass through me at the thought that I was going mad. Standing before a mirror I would put my finger into my eyes to see if the eyelids would close, but they would not. Horrified, I would often burst into tears and pray, 'Mother, is this the result of praying and wholly surrendering myself unto Thee? Ah! Thou hast visited me with a fell disease!' But the next moment I would say, 'Let it be as Thou wishest. Let this body go to pieces, but leave me not. Reveal Thyself to me, be kind to Thy helpless son, O Mother, I have taken shelter at Thy lotus feet. Thou art my only refuge.' As I prayed thus, my mind would again be stimulated, this body would seem a trifle, not worth thinking about, and the blissful Mother would appear before me and console me with Her gracious words."

Sri Ramakrishna used to say that when in the course of spiritual practice the aspirant's mind becomes sufficiently purified, it acts as the Guru. In the light of this statement we can understand to a certain extent the meaning of his extraordinary

vision about the "double" coming out of his body. It betokened a high degree of concentration, where the contents of the mind took a concrete form and lived and moved like an embodied being.

One of his Sadhanas of this interesting period consisted in banishing from his mind all attachment to wealth. Sitting on the bank of the Ganga, he took some earth in one hand and a few rupees in the other, weighing their value mentally as he passed them from hand to hand. Money, he said to himself, can at best give only a comfortable living and some facilities for charity—that is all. It cannot give realization of God, which is the only thing worth having in life. Hence it has no more real value than this handful of earth. Firmly impressing this idea on his mind, he finally consigned both to the Ganga. Again, for the complete effacement of a sense of superiority from his mind, he washed unclean places like an ordinary sweeper, viewing alike all objects of the world as but modifications of matter. Following out this idea he taught his mind to regard sandal-paste and filth as the same, and he would touch them both with equal indifference.

Mathur's regard for Sri Ramakrishna was deepening day by day. He was ever careful about his comforts, as the following incident will show. One day Sri Ramakrishna entered one of the Shiva temples at Dakshineswar and began to recite the *Shiva Mahimnah-Stotram*, a beautiful hymn in praise of Shiva. Soon he was overpowered with emotion at the thought of His great glory and forgot the world. Coming to a particularly beautiful stanza in which the glories of the Lord are declared as altogether indescribable, his feeling rose to a climax, and he was brought face to face, as it were, with the great God. He no longer remembered the order of the lines or the stanzas composing the hymn, and even forgot its language. "O Lord, how can I describe Thy infinite glory?"—were the only words that came from his lips. Tears began to flow profusely from his eyes. His strange conduct caused people to gather around him, though he was not conscious of them. Mathur, who happened to be present at Dakshineswar, hurried to the spot. He stood by, mutely watching the spectacle. An officious employee suggested that this "mad" man be removed from the proximity of the Deity, whereupon Mathur said that any one touching Sri Rama-

krishna would do so at his peril. This silenced the men present. After a long time Sri Ramakrishna gradually recovered normal consciousness. He was astonished to see so many people looking at him. Seeing Mathur, he asked him in a childlike way if he had done anything wrong in a state of unconsciousness. "Oh, no," replied Mathur, "you were only reciting a hymn, and I stood here to see that nobody disturbed you."

Some time after this, a remarkable incident happened which greatly increased Mathur's regard for Sri Ramakrishna. One day, in the long verandah on the east side of his room, the latter was pacing to and fro, absorbed in deep thought. Mathur was seated alone in his room, whence he could have a good view of the Master. For a long time he watched, the latter not being at all conscious that he was being observed. Suddenly an unexpected thing happened. Mathur ran to him, prostrated himself and began to weep like a child at his feet. Sri Ramakrishna was taken aback and said, "What is this? You are the son-in-law of Rani Rasmani. What will people think if they see you behave like this? Be calm and get up." But Mathur still wept. When he regained his composure a little, he explained the reason for his emotions: "I watched you as you were pacing in the verandah. When you went one way, I saw you in the form of the Blissful Mother; when you turned in the opposite direction, you took on the form of the Lord Shiva! At first I thought it was hallucination. I rubbed my eyes and looked again; but to my astonishment every time I saw the same phenomenon." As he spoke, Mathur wept, so overwhelmed was he with emotion. "But I know nothing of it," reiterated the Master in his characteristic way. Referring to this incident he said later on, "Mathur would not be comforted at the time. I felt nervous lest Rani Rasmani should learn of it and think I had hypnotised him." Then he would add, "Was it for nothing that Mathur respected and looked so much after the comforts of this body (meaning himself)? Mother showed him many wonderful things time and again. It was written in his horoscope that his Ishta (Chosen Deity) would be always gracious unto him, nay, would move in flesh and blood with him."

After this, Mathur's regard and devotion increased a thousandfold. Henceforth he counted it as a rare privilege to be of

the least service to the Master, and always complied with his wishes. And we shall see later on how he was intimately associated with a great part of the Master's subsequent Sadhanas.

We now come to a noteworthy event in the life of Sri Ramakrishna. It was the death of Rani Rasmani, which took place on the 19th of February 1861. Before passing away she had the satisfaction of seeing two of her great desires fulfilled, namely, the consecration of the temple at Dakshineswar and a permanent arrangement for its future efficient management. The part she had to play in the divine drama of which Sri Ramakrishna was the hero, was done, and the time was come for her exit. She fell ill with fever and stomach trouble, which developed into a chronic dysentery of a serious type. It is said that her last days were embittered by the refusal of her eldest daughter, Padmamani Dasi, to sign the document waiving her claims to the property of the Kali temple. A few days before her death Rani Rasmani was taken to her house at Kalighat on the bank of the sacred Adiganga. Shortly before her death she was brought to the Ganga. Seeing some lamps lighted before her, she exclaimed, "Remove those lights. How tame they look now ! Ah, my Mother is coming—the halo of Her form has illumined the whole place." After a slight pause she said, "Mother, art Thou come ? Well, Padma refused to sign, will that do any harm, Mother ?" Uttering these words she passed away quietly, and her soul, leaving behind the fret and fever of this world, soared high into Divine Realms.

On the death of Rani Rasmani, Mathur became the sole executor of the estate. He sought to place himself unreservedly at the disposal of the Master and since his great vision, it was his one desire to live always near him. Not only would he arrange the trips which Sri Ramakrishna desired to make, but would often, as in the case of his visit to the Panihati Fair, go himself in disguise, with a few attendants, to look after him.

On the eve of his embarking on a varied course of Sadhana, Sri Ramakrishna felt the necessity of support from some one who could supply him with the requisites for those practices. He even prayed to the Mother for such a one. Later on, the Master spoke of Mathur as the first of the five supporters, engaged for him by the Divine Mother. Whenever any desire arose in his mind, he would speak of it to Mathur, who was

only too glad to fulfil it at once. At the same time, Sri Ramakrishna was very kind to Mathur. Yet on questions of vital importance, where some principle was at stake, he never yielded to the latter or hesitated to say what he deemed to be the right thing. His treatment of Mathur was characterised by a spirit of independence as well as of simplicity. It never occurred to him to try to curry favour, for he knew that the Omniscient Mother would in time fulfil his desires. One day some ornaments were stolen from the images of the Deities in the Radhakanta temple. Mathur heard of it and in the presence of Sri Ramakrishna apostrophised the gods, "Ah, you were powerless to protect your own ornaments from the thief!" This at once elicited a rebuke from the Master, who said, "What nonsense you speak! God cares very little for these clods of earth which you call jewels. They are precious to you, not to Him, for is not Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth, His servant-maid?"

Mathur one day proposed to Sri Ramakrishna that he would set apart a large estate in his name. At this Sri Ramakrishna thundered, "What! Do you intend to make me a worldly man!" Mathur often invited him to his residence at Jaun Bazar and spent many delightful days with him there. In the evenings he would take him out for a drive. He bought costly utensils of gold and silver for the use of the Master and many costly robes. But Sri Ramakrishna remained the same child of the Divine Mother, perfectly unattached. One day a very expensive shawl was purchased for him. He took it cheerfully and like a boy showed it to others. But his discriminating mind soon began to argue, "What is there in it? Nothing but goat's wool. Like every other thing it is also a modification of matter. It protects one from cold no doubt, but this can be done as well by a blanket or quilt. And like other material things it does not help one to realize God. Rather it makes its owner assume an air of superiority. He thinks himself rich and is proud. So it takes a man away from God." As he was weighing thus in his mind the evils which the shawl was likely to produce, he threw the beautiful shawl on the ground and began to trample and spit on it. Not content with this, he was about to burn it, when some one rescued it. On hearing of the incident Mathur said with a smile that it was well done.

Mathur had a family priest in the Kalighat temple, named

Chandra Halдар. For some days he had been noticing Mathur's devotion to Sri Ramakrishna. Wishing to monopolize the rich man's favour, he was alarmed to find a competitor in the field. He determined to put a stop to it. One day Sri Ramakrishna lay in an outer room of Mathur's Jaun Bazar house in a half-conscious state, when the priest suddenly came in. There was no one near by. The man pushed the Master several times and said, "Well, tell me how you hypnotised Mathur Babu." Sri Ramakrishna kept silent, for he had not the power to speak then. The priest getting no answer to his repeated queries was exasperated and kicked the Master thrice before he went away. Sri Ramakrishna knew what the consequences would be if the matter were reported to Mathur. So he kept it to himself.

Thus Mathur was impressed with Sri Ramakrishna's invulnerable purity and simplicity in all circumstances and found him to be absolutely proof against lust and wealth.

BHAIRAVI BRAHMANI

One morning Sri Ramakrishna was plucking flowers in the garden of Dakshineswar, when he saw a country-boat coming towards the smaller bathing ghat of the temple. A woman with a small bundle in her hand stepped out of the boat. Middle-aged, beautiful, and with long dishevelled hair, she appeared from her ochre-coloured robes to be a Sannyasini. All her belongings consisted of a few books and one or two pieces of cloth. Though nearly forty years of age, she looked much younger. Sri Ramakrishna must have been attracted to her at the very first sight, for as soon as he espied her, he went to his own room. Calling Hriday he gave him a description of the woman and asked him to bring her from the Chandni¹ to his presence. "She is a stranger. Why should she come even if invited?" replied Hriday, rather surprised, for he had never before seen his uncle eager to speak to any strange woman. "Go and tell her about me, and she will come"—that was all he said.

Without another word Hriday went to the Chandni, where he found the nun or Bhairavi, as she was called, seated. He gave her his uncle's message. The Bhairavi at once complied with his request, which again surprised Hriday.

As soon as the Bhairavi met Sri Ramakrishna, she burst into tears of joy and surprise and said in a tender voice, "My son, you are here! Knowing that you were somewhere on the banks of the Ganga, I have been searching for you so long, and now I have found you."

"How could you know about me, mother?" asked Sri Ramakrishna.

She replied, "Through the grace of the Divine Mother I had come to know that I was to meet three of you. Two I have already met in East Bengal, and today I find you."

She spoke with emotion, as though she had found her long-lost treasure at last. Sri Ramakrishna, too, was visibly moved.

After a while, she spoke of herself. Born of a Brahmin family in the District of Jessore (Bengal) she had come to know

¹The roofed court which is the main entrance to the temple compound.

through Yoga power that there were three great personages in Bengal to all of whom she was to deliver a certain message. The two she had already met were named Chandra and Girija, both from the District of Barisal. Sri Ramakrishna sat close by her, and like a boy opening his heart to his mother, related to her every incident of his Sadhana—his wonderful visions, his total loss of outward consciousness in the meditation of God, the burning sensation all over the body, his sleeplessness and other symptoms. He further said that people looked upon him as insane, because his actions differed so widely from those of the common run of men. He asked repeatedly, "Can you tell me what these symptoms are? Am I really mad? And is this the result of my praying day and night to the Mother?" The Sannyasini listened to his recital with feelings of joy and wonder. Full of motherly tenderness, she again and again consoled him, "Who calls you mad, my son? This is not insanity. Your state is what is called Mahabhava¹ in the Shastras. It is because people do not understand this blessed state of yours that they call you mad. Sri Radha experienced this state and so did Sri Gauranga. All these are recorded in the Bhakti texts. I have these books with me, and I shall show you that whoever has sincerely yearned for God has experienced this state, and everyone doing so must pass through it." These words reassured Sri Ramakrishna.

Finding that the day had already advanced, Sri Ramakrishna gave her some Prasad from the Kali temple, and knowing that, with her maternal attitude towards him, she would not take it unless he partook of it first, ate some. She went around the temples, took the Prasad, and later came to the Panchavati with doles of raw foodstuffs to cook and offer to her Chosen Deity, Raghuvir, a stone emblem of whom she always kept with her.

The cooking over, she placed the food before Raghuvir and closed her eyes in meditation while offering it. Soon she had a divine vision, and sunk in deep meditation, she became totally unconscious of the world. Tears of joy trickled down her cheeks. In the mean time Sri Ramakrishna had felt a strong

¹An extraordinary state of religious ecstasy mentioned in books of Bhakti, attended with nineteen external characteristics such as shedding of tears, tremor of body, standing of hair on end, perspiration, etc.

urge to come to the Panchavati and appeared there in a semi-conscious mood. He advanced to the place where the Bhairavi sat absorbed in meditation. Like a sleeping man, he unconsciously began to take the food offered to Raghuvir. Soon after she opened her eyes, and a thrill of rapture passed through her as she saw Sri Ramakrishna taking her offerings, for there was a curious similarity between her vision and the scene that was being enacted before her. Yet she could hardly believe her eyes. Sri Ramakrishna, when he recovered his normal state of mind, felt abashed for what he had done. He apologised saying, "Really I do not know why I do this kind of thing in a state of unconsciousness." She consoled him with the words, "You have done well, my son. It is not really you, but He who is within you that has done this, as He always does. In my meditation I clearly realized who did it and why. I have come to understand that there is no further need for my formal worship, which has borne fruit at length." Then without the slightest hesitation she took the remnants of the food as sacred Prasad, and later on she consigned to the Ganga the emblem she had so long devoutly worshipped, for she had found her beloved Deity in the person of Sri Ramakrishna !

"Mother, I shall learn if Thou alone teachest me," this prayer of Sri Ramakrishna to the Mother of the universe was fulfilled by his meeting with the Sannyasini or "Brahmani" as he used to designate her—who came at the psychological moment when he needed confirmation from the scriptures for his various realizations, ridiculed as vagaries of a diseased brain. To Sri Ramakrishna this was an additional proof that the Divine Mother was guiding him.

The relation of mother and son which sprang up between them from their very first meeting deepened as they became better acquainted. The Brahmani took up her residence in the Dakshineswar temple. Both passed a great part of the day in the Panchavati, in religious conversation. The Brahmani had dived deep into the various Hindu scriptures, specially the Tantras and the Vaishnava literature. Besides, she had long practised religious exercises, which gave a great practical value to her book knowledge. The Master's questions as to his various experiences she would settle by quoting from authoritative texts wherein are recorded similar experiences of previous

seekers after truth. All this had a reassuring effect upon Sri Ramakrishna's mind.

Scarcely a week had passed when it struck Sri Ramakrishna that people might misunderstand his close association with the Brahmani. One day he threw out a hint to her to the effect. She agreed with him and decided to put up somewhere in the village whence she could come and go every day. She fixed her abode on Devamandal's Ghat at Ariadaha, a couple of miles north of the Dakshineswar temple. There was no difficulty about her food and requirements, for she soon won over the village people by her amiable personality. She used to go to see Sri Ramakrishna daily. The Brahmani, who was a Vaishnava devotee of a high order, was soon overpowered with Vatsalya Bhava (motherly attitude) towards Sri Ramakrishna. She loved to feed him with various sweets and milk preparations, as Yashoda did her son, Sri Krishna. In her room she would often wait with cream and butter in her hand and cry "Gopala" in an excess of feeling, while tears fell from her eyes. At that moment Sri Ramakrishna would feel a strong urge to see her, and like a boy pining for his mother, he would run to her. Then he would sit by her and take the cream and butter. Or again, the Brahmani would put on a silk cloth and various ornaments—which she procured for this purpose—and in company of other women of the locality lead a procession to Dakshineswar, singing songs descriptive of Yashoda's love for her boy, and with the sweets she brought she would feed Sri Ramakrishna. These touching scenes, with the holy associations they evoked, made a profound impression on the hearts of the spectators, and Krishna's mother would be recalled to their minds.

Judging from what Sri Ramakrishna had told her, the Brahmani concluded that his extraordinary experiences were the result of his extreme love of God. Every day she saw him go into trance as they talked on spiritual matters. From his loss of outward consciousness in meditation, his ecstasy during Sankirtanas, and various other traits of his character, she was convinced that he had scaled the ultimate heights of spiritual realization. She had read in the *Chaitanya-Charitamrita*, the *Chaitanya-Bhagavata*, and other books treating of Sri Gauranga's life, that the Lord would incarnate Himself again

to redeem the people from their misery and ignorance. This idea came to her mind when she found such a strange analogy between the life of Sri Chaitanya and that of Sri Ramakrishna. Both were mad after God ; both developed the same extraordinary symptoms, including the power of transmitting spiritual fervour to others by touching them while in a state of ecstasy. These and many other incidents common to these two lives indicated to the Brahmani that the Lord has incarnated again in the person of Sri Ramakrishna.

Another incident happening at this time confirmed the belief of the Brahmani. We have already referred to the burning sensation from which Sri Ramakrishna suffered. This trouble reappeared during his second period of divine madness, that is, shortly after the Brahmani's advent, and continued with more or less intensity. All the efforts of physicians failed to alleviate it. The pain began with sunrise and increased as the day advanced. At noon it was so intolerable that Sri Ramakrishna had to plunge into the Ganga and cover his head with a wet napkin. Three or four hours every day were spent this way. Fearing that too long immersion might lead to other troubles, he would come out of the water and lie on the marble floor, after cooling it by rubbing with a wet cloth. Though experts and laymen all ascribed this malady to some internal disorder, the Brahmani found another cause for it. She diagnosed it as the effect of his strong yearning for God. She added on the evidence of scriptures that this symptom had been manifested in Sri Radha and, in recent history, in Sri Gouranga Deva, when a tempest of divine emotion had blown over their minds. On scriptural authority, again, she prescribed a curious remedy for it. The patient had only to wear a garland of fragrant flowers and paint his body with sandal-paste. Of course everybody ridiculed the idea as being preposterous. But Mathur thought that there was no harm in trying it ; accordingly it was done. Great was the astonishment when Sri Ramakrishna completely recovered under the treatment in three days. Many would not give credit to the Brahmani's treatment and called it an accident. The incident was a further help to the Brahmani in identifying the soul that dwelt in Sri Ramakrishna's body. And when she heard of Sri Ramakrishna's vision of two boys coming out of his body on the way to Sihore,

it made her assurance doubly sure. She concluded and told Sri Ramakrishna that this time Sri Chaitanya had appeared in the frame of his comrade Nityananda.

A few days after, another symptom, of a different kind but no less troublesome, made its appearance. Sri Ramakrishna himself described it thus: "I was seized with a ravenous appetite which no amount of food could satisfy. No sooner had I taken something than I again felt hungry. Day and night one thought alone possessed my mind, and that was what to eat. 'What may this new disease be', I anxiously thought. When I consulted the Brahmani, she replied, 'My son, don't worry. Those who advance on the path of spirituality pass through such abnormal states. Wait, I shall cure it.' She asked Mathur to store in a room a large quantity of edibles of all sorts. When it was done she told me to remain in that room day and night and eat whenever and whatever I liked. I did so—moving about and taking every now and then a bit of something or other according to fancy. After three days I was cured."

This sort of appetite has been recorded in the lives of other aspirants. Sri Ramakrishna experienced this abnormal craving for food several times in his life.

These successful experiments, the strange coincidence of the various realizations of Sri Ramakrishna with the recorded evidence of the scriptures, and the wonderful experience she had on the very first day of her meeting, left no doubt whatsoever in the mind of the Brahmani as to the truth of her bold hypothesis about the Master's real personality. Now she openly asserted that Sri Ramakrishna was not an ordinary devotee, nor even a superman with lofty spiritual realization, but that he was an Incarnation of God born into this world for some inscrutable purpose. When she was convinced that her conclusions were correct, she began to speak of them freely not only to Sri Ramakrishna and Hriday, but to many others.

One day Sri Ramakrishna was seated with Hriday and Mathur in the Panchavati, when he casually remarked to the latter, "You see, a Brahmin lady has come here. She calls me an Incarnation of God." "How can that be," replied Mathur, "since the scriptures mention only ten Incarnations, and there is no room for an eleventh one? But I admit you have obtained the grace of the Mother Kali."

"She says, she finds the distinguishing marks of an Incarnation on my body and in my mind," said the Master. "She is well versed in the scriptures, and she has also a lot of books with her."

They were talking thus, when they saw the Brahmani approaching with a plate of sweetmeats. Mathur asked the Master if she were the one of whom he had been speaking. Sri Ramakrishna nodded in reply. Mathur found her in a half-abstracted mood—as Yashoda used to be when feeding her darling. As she drew near, she saw Mathur and, controlling her emotions with some effort, gave the plate to Hriday. Pointing to Mathur the Master said to the Brahmani, "I was just telling him of what you say about me. But he says that the scriptures mention only ten Incarnations and no more." Mathur bowed to her and awaited an answer. "Why," she quickly replied, "the *Bhagavata* actually records twenty-two and then makes room for an infinite number of them. Besides, it is clearly mentioned in the Vaishnava scriptures that Sri Gauranga would be incarnated again, and there is a striking resemblance in many points between him and Sri Ramakrishna." She added that a Vaishnava scholar would settle the point, and that she was prepared to prove her case. Mathur remained silent.

The Brahmani's bold declaration made a profound impression in the Kali temple. The man who had hitherto been looked upon as a lunatic was emphatically declared to be an Incarnation of God, and the scriptures supported this contention! The very man who had been ridiculed and slighted by everybody, was being ranked with Sri Krishna, Ramachandra, or Buddha! He became the burning topic of the hour. Mathur was puzzled. Torn between faith and doubt, he found himself in a dilemma. From his own experiences with Sri Ramakrishna during the past few years he had to admit that he possessed many superhuman traits. But he was not ready to think of him as God Himself. So the momentous declaration of the Brahmani raised a storm in his mind. Besides her disinterestedness, which was in her favour, the Brahmani was ready to verify her statement by scriptural authority. She had sent out a challenge. She was prepared to meet any scholar to prove her contention. Sri Ramakrishna, like a boy, was eager to have the meeting. Partly to satisfy his own curiosity and to settle his own doubts, and

partly to humour Sri Ramakrishna as well as to convince him of his eccentricities, Mathur consented to invite some of the scholars of the day to the garden of Dakshineswar to test the soundness of the Brahmani's contention.

It was decided to invite Vaishnav Charan and Gauri Kanta, two famous scholars. A great devotee, Vaishnav Charan at that time was one of the leaders of his society, an adept in various philosophies and scriptures—specially in books on devotion. A real Sadhaka,¹ he was eagerly sought by the people of his sect for advice in their respective paths of Sadhana. By inviting him, Mathur had chosen the right man. And Gauri, too, was pre-eminently fitted for the task he was called upon to perform.

In a few days Vaishnav Charan arrived at Dakshineswar with other scholars and devotees, and a small meeting was held in which the Brahmani, Mathur, and Sri Ramakrishna were present. Addressing the Pundits, the Brahmani explained to them what she had heard about Sri Ramakrishna's spiritual practices and what she herself had observed, the conclusions of the scriptures on this point, and lastly, what she thought about the real nature of Sri Ramakrishna. Turning to Vaishnav Charan she said, "This is my honest conviction about this God-man based on the interpretation of certain facts according to the scriptures. I really believe him to be an Incarnation of God. Now please state your reasons if you differ from me." Like a heroic mother, she held herself in readiness to answer all objections. And what about the man around whom this discussion pivoted? Sitting in the midst of that assembly, he looked like a boy, perfectly indifferent to the verdict, as if it did not concern him at all. We can picture him sitting at ease, immersed in his own blissful thoughts, sometimes smiling, sometimes taking a pinch of spices from a pouch, or again saying to Vaishnav Charan, "Look here, sometimes I feel like this, or that." The result of the meeting was that Vaishnav Charan subscribed heartily to all the conclusions of the Brahmani. Further he asserted that the supreme devotion known as the Mahabhava seemed fully manifest in Sri Ramakrishna. It was really wonderful, he added, that while in certain extraordinary cases only a few of its divine characteristics had been noticeable, in Sri Ramakrishna all of them seemed to be fully manifest. Mathur

¹ One actually engaged in religious practices and discipline.

and others were struck dumb at this bold assertion of Vaishnav Charan. Sri Ramakrishna, like a boy, said to Mathur, "To think that he should say so ! It pleases me to learn that after all it is not disease."

That Vaishnav Charan did not say these things out of mere sentiment was proved by his attitude towards Sri Ramakrishna. With every day of their acquaintance, his regard and esteem for the Master deepened. He became a frequent visitor to the Kali temple of Dakshineswar, where he sought the advice and guidance of the Master in spiritual matters. He occasionally invited other devotees of his order to accompany him, so that they, too, might consult Sri Ramakrishna. Vaishnav Charan belonged to the Kartabhaja¹ sect of the Vaishnavas. At a place a few miles north of Calcutta, he had a number of devotees, of both sexes, who practised Sadhana under his guidance. At his request Sri Ramakrishna visited there a number of times. But the familiarity between the sexes in this sect—the real cause of its degeneration—was always repugnant to him. He shuddered at the licence prevalent among them and could not reconcile their professions with their actual practice. But even here there were some sincere devotees, which led him to revise his opinion of this cult. Thenceforth he concluded that a man, though engaged in some apparently reprehensible form of Sadhana, could progress spiritually and ultimately attain to the goal if he only performed it sincerely as a religious practice. As days went on, Vaishnav Charan was so impressed with Sri Ramakrishna's pure character and wonderful spiritual life that he felt no scruple in proclaiming him to be an Incarnation of God.

A few days after this memorable meeting, Pundit Gauri Kanta Tarkabhushan of Indesh, District of Bankura, arrived at Dakshineswar. He was a great Sadhaka of the Tantrika school, and every year during the Durga Puja worshipped his own wife as a representation of the Mother. He had a strange method of making sacrifice (Homa). Instead of arranging the sacrificial faggots on the ground, as is the usual custom, he would pile them—a weight of some eighty pounds—on the palm of his outstretched left hand. Then he would set fire to them with his right hand and hold them in that position till the ceremony was

¹ A small sect in Bengal, the adherents of which look upon their Guru as God.

over. Sri Ramakrishna himself saw him do it and used to say it was one of his extraordinary powers.

On the arrival of Gauri Pundit at Dakshineswar an amusing incident occurred, which Sri Ramakrishna would often narrate to his devotees. Gauri was far-famed as a great scholar, and nobody could stand before him in debate. People ascribed this to his miraculous powers. Whenever challenged in a meeting of scholars, he would enter the hall thundering the refrain of a hymn to the Divine Mother, adding some martial syllables in order to inspire awe. It is said that this chanting served a two-fold purpose, that of unnerving his opponents and awakening a strange power in him. Sri Ramakrishna would say that when he entered in this belligerent manner, it was impossible for anybody to defeat him in argument. Gauri entered the precincts of the Kali temple in the usual fashion. Sri Ramakrishna was seated in his own room and did not know anything about the Pundit's powers, but he was impelled by some power within him to utter the same words as Gauri was intoning, but in a louder voice. At this the latter raised his voice to a higher pitch, to which the Master replied by shouting louder. This competition between the two seemed so like the raid of a gang of dacoits that the guards ran from all sides with their clubs. But to their surprise they found that it was nothing but a contest between the Pundit and their mad priest as to the respective strength of their lungs ! Gauri, not being able to raise his pitch higher than Sri Ramakrishna, had to acknowledge defeat and entered the compound with a sullen countenance. Sri Ramakrishna afterwards said that the Divine Mother had transferred to him the great powers which had made Gauri invincible in debate, but which acted at the same time as a barrier to his realization of God. In the course of a few days Gauri was charmed with the wonderful character of Sri Ramakrishna and surrendered himself wholly to him.

A few days after the arrival of Gauri, Mathur convened another assembly of the Pundits, to which, of course, Vaishnav Charan was invited. The object of the meeting was, as before, to test the mental and spiritual state of Sri Ramakrishna by the touchstone of the scriptures. The meeting was to take place in the morning, and the place chosen was the big hall in front of the Kali temple. Seeing that Vaishnav Charan was late in coming,

Sri Ramakrishna proceeded towards the appointed place with Gauri. Before taking his seat in the hall Sri Ramakrishna entered the Kali temple and bowed before the goddess. He was coming out of the temple overwhelmed with emotion when Vaishnav Charan appeared and touched his feet. Sri Ramakrishna at once fell into a trance, and sat on the latter's shoulders. A thrill of divine joy passed through Vaishnav Charan's heart, and thinking himself greatly blessed at the holy touch, he began to praise the Master by composing then and there a Sanskrit hymn. The radiant countenance of Sri Ramakrishna and the reverent pose of Vaishnav Charan as he uttered the melodious verses in his exuberance of joy, filled everybody with bliss. After a while the Master returned to his normal state, and all slowly moved on to the place of meeting.

The proceedings commenced. Gauri said, addressing the assembled Pundits, "Vaishnav Charan is really fortunate. He has received divine favour today ; so I shall not argue with him. Even if I did, I should certainly be defeated. Besides I find that we both agree on the main issue and have both arrived at the same conclusion regarding Sri Ramakrishna. Any debate, therefore, is superfluous." Not that Gauri was afraid of his opponent's scholarship, but the fact was that he himself had come to feel, through his own spiritual insight, that Sri Ramakrishna was no ordinary saint. One day the Master by way of testing him said, "Vaishnav Charan tells everybody that God has incarnated Himself in this body. How it is possible? What do you say?" "Is this all he says about you?" replied Gauri gravely. "Then he has said too little. I am firmly convinced that you are that mine of infinite spiritual Power, only a small fraction of which appears in the world from time to time in the form of Incarnations."

"Ah," said Sri Ramakrishna with a smile. "you seem to outbid him in this matter. What do you find in me which leads you to entertain this idea?"

"I feel it in my heart," replied Gauri, "and the scriptures are on my side. I am ready to prove my contention to anybody who challenges me in the matter."

"Well, it is you who say so," Sri Ramakrishna said like a boy. "but believe me, I know nothing about it."

Thus the two great scholars who came to test Sri Ramakrishna ended by surrendering themselves at his feet.

This was the first important episode in the life of Sri Ramakrishna since his meeting with the Brahmani. In the swift march of events that followed, it is impossible for us to fix our attention on the more important and deeper currents of thought which left a profound impress on the lives of both Sri Ramakrishna and the Brahmani. The relationship gradually became deep and intimate. Sri Ramakrishna accepted her as one of his Gurus and under her guidance practised a most difficult course of Tantrika Sadhanas. The spiritual outlook of the Guru herself was considerably broadened, as we shall see, by contact with her wonderful disciple.

The thing that comes uppermost to our minds in this connection is the strange fact of his accepting a woman as a Guru. Happening in the life of a man whose chief advice later to his devotees may be summed up in the phrase, "renunciation of woman and wealth", and who seemed to consider the presence of a woman the greatest obstacle to a man in the path of Sadhana, this incident is all the more significant and deserves careful consideration. In spite of his warning against association with women, the Master accepted one as his spiritual guide and sat at her feet for instruction. He demonstrated thereby that there is nothing innate in a woman that obstructs a man's spiritual progress—rather it is the attitude of the man towards her that helps or hinders. If one loves a woman for her physical charms only, she degrades instead of ennobling, but if one looks to the divinity of her nature and sees the Mother of the universe manifesting through her, she will help to cut the bonds of matter and show the way to bliss. Woman cannot be shunned, for in this world you cannot escape her. So long as there is the idea of sex, it will follow you everywhere. You can evade it only by regarding woman as mother or sister or daughter—that is, in the purest of relationships. But if you insult her—use her as a toy for pleasure—the nemesis of her wrath will follow you even to the outermost limits of the world. Sri Ramakrishna demonstrated in his life the proper attitude of man towards woman and *vice versa*, a precious boon to humanity for all time to come.

Secondly, from the time of this contact Sri Ramakrishna's Sadhana took a new direction and flowed through new channels.

Hitherto he had tried to realize God without any eternal help or guidance. He had received no help from his first Guru, Kenaram Bhattacharya, except at the moment of initiation. By his own tremendous efforts, under the guidance of the ever-wakeful Teacher concealed in the hearts of all, Sri Ramakrishna had achieved the apparently impossible feat of transcending all the limitations of finite existence, and uncovering his true relationship with the One Existence-Knowledge-Bliss, in the compass of a few short years. By his zeal and devotion to God, his reunciation of worldly things, phenomenal perseverance, and unflagging determination, he removed the last barrier of nescience from his mind, and divine Truth stood revealed before him in all its purity and splendour. We learn from his Sadhana that in attempting to realize the divine we do not aspire after something new or extraneous. What does not really belong to us, can never be ours. By our struggle we only discover what in reality belongs to us. And for this glorious culmination, the first thing that is needed is zeal. Without this element in the struggle, without tenacity of purpose, no amount of spirituality injected from without, no amount of spiritual knowledge, pilgrimage, association with devotees, prostration, or genuflection will be of any avail. But the idea is too abstract—too high and sublime—for the average person. Therefore we see myriads of scriptures and endless processes of Sadhana, which take the aspirant step by step to the supreme goal. The lives of saints, prophets, and Incarnations of God serve only to awaken in our hearts a burning desire to get rid of ignorance.

In the person of the Brahmani Sri Ramakrishna found a living Guru under whose guidance he proceeded, as we shall see later on, along the path marked out by the scriptures, to arrive ultimately at the same truth which he had realized before by his own unaided efforts.

Thirdly, it is clear from Sri Ramakrishna's meeting with the Brahmani that all necessary help is brought to the sincere soul at the proper time ; and if he only fervently prays to God, he is looked after. It teaches us the lesson that all that we require in religious life is to kindle a great zeal for divine realization, and the rest will be added unto us when necessary. Impatience only mars the peace and sweetness of life without helping us in any way.

And the last, though not the least, important point about this historic meeting was the correct evaluation of Sri Ramakrishna's personality and his potential greatness. Up to then everybody had measured the depth of this unique life by the foot-rule of his own shallow experience. Even Mathur was no exception. So while the realizations of the Master were being weighed in the balance by incompetent judges, it was the Brahmani who turned the scale overwhelmingly in his favour by her declaration. The matter, perhaps, would have stopped there, had she not challenged the world to disprove her if it could. What the result was we already know.

Thus the recognition of Sri Ramakrishna's greatness may be said to date from the time of the Brahmani's arrival at Dakshineswar. It was she who strung together and found a meaning for the hitherto isolated and neglected facts of his life, and pointed out their tremendous significance. She was the first to be convinced of his great mission—the role he was to play in the future adjustment of the world's spiritual ideas—and she knew her own part in it too. She set herself to work for the fulfilment of this divine purpose and faithfully contributed her own quota of service towards the unfoldment of this wonderful life.

And a word about the man who was suddenly transported by her from a region of ignominy to one of universal homage. From the opprobrium of supposed lunacy to the supreme honour of Avatarahood is a jump sufficiently long to turn the head of any mortal, however sane. But simple child of the Divine Mother as he was, this adoration and praise did not affect him in the least. He kept his gaze fastened on the lotus feet of the Mother and yearned only for Her guidance and inspiration. A crown was offered to him and he set it aside—not like a Caesar as we see in the play, but actually and definitely. For praise or blame—acceptance or rejection—is nothing but a phantom of Maya to him whose mind always soars in the transcendental region of Eternal Truth.

TANTRIKA SADHANA

Man has natural tendency to enjoyment and does not welcome renunciation. He finds it difficult to call upon the Lord in a pure and simple way, and instinctively hugs to his bosom some illusion in the midst of truth. Even when renouncing lust and wealth, he would like a passing glimpse of them. Hence it is that we find in the sacred books immediately after the definite statement that the worship of the Divine Mother should be performed in the purest way possible, room is made for sensuous songs on the plea that these will be pleasing to the goddess. There is nothing to be wondered at in this tendency of the human mind. It only shows how strong are the ties of sense-attraction with which the Mother of the universe has bound Her creatures. The painful idea is perceived that unless She out of Her infinite grace leads us out of this intricate maze, we are powerless. It is not flattering to our vanity to realize that She alone knows the way out.

In tracing the origin of the Tantrika mode of worship, we have to go back to the Vedic times when both enjoyment and renunciation were sought to be combined in the Karma-kanda or the ritualistic portion of the Vedas. The goal of human life in that age seems to have been the regulated enjoyment of sense-objects, by propitiating the gods through prayers and sacrifices. When in this way the mind was somewhat purified, and divested of lower desires, then the man took up the higher course of discipline prescribed in the Upanishads. But with the advent of the Buddhistic age things took a different turn. The methods of worship which were suited to pure-souled recluses alone were prescribed for the ordinary householder, irrespective of his taste or capacity, and the laws of the state lent countenance to this. The result was that the Vedic sacrifices, which had in view the object of gradually weaning the aspirant's mind from the enjoyment of the senses, were replaced by a system of clandestine worship—conducted in dreary, out of the way places, at dead of night—so that outsiders, and specially the emissaries of law, might get no clue. There seems to be a good deal of truth in the statement that the Tantrika rites were introduced by the

Lord Shiva in place of Vedic rituals, which in the course of time had fallen into disuse. For not only do they combine enjoyment and renunciation like the Vedic rites of old, but one also finds in them an intimate connection between the ritualistic portion and philosophy—which were distinct branches in the Vedic age. Every act of worship according to the Tantras necessitates some sort of meditation on the unity of the aspirant with the Lord—of the Jiva with the Paramatman. For instance, sitting down to worship, one has to mentally raise the Kundalini Shakti—the resultant of the past impressions or the entire potentiality of a man supposed to be coiled up at the lowest extremity of the spinal column—to the “thousand-petalled” lotus in the brain, and think of this symbol of the aspirant himself as identified with God residing there. Then he is to imagine himself as separate from Him, with the spirit of the Lord condensed into a luminous form of god or goddess which is to be worshipped. He projects Him out of himself on the image or symbol before him and worships Him. After the worship is over he mentally withdraws the deity into himself. Now, on reflection it will be found that in this process of worship a fine attempt has been made to realize the ultimate object of human life, viz identification with the Lord, through love. It is true that only one in a thousand may be able to perform the above meditation in a proper way, but none can deny the fact that all at least may try to do so, and this effort in itself is a slow advance towards the goal. Thus, every Tantrika rite invariably directs the mind of the worshipper to the underlying unity of existence.

Again, the Tantras teach the motherhood of God and, simultaneously with it, a glorification of woman. Neither in the Vedas nor in the Puranas do we come across this idea. In some portions of the Vedas it appears in a rudimentary form, where the husband is instructed to look upon the body of his wife as sacred and to worship the gods therein, so that she may be the mother of a worthy child. The Tantras sublimated this old idea and developed it along new lines, with conspicuous results, for it was found suited to certain temperaments of the age. This may have been the origin of the Virachara form of Tantrika practice in which wine and woman play a part. The authors of the Tantras were right in their assumption that the average man should have a share of the good things of life. And as he

enjoys he is to see God in the objects of enjoyment. Then he will not be carried away by his pursuit of the senses, and at some time or other he will set himself to cultivate self-control and renunciation. Hence they declared that the woman's body is sacred, that one should always look upon a woman as a goddess and, realizing her as one of the manifestations of the Mother of the universe, treat her with all respect. Maltreatment of women was strictly forbidden.

But in spite of this forethought on the part of the inaugurators of this system, its followers with the lapse of time, became slaves to passion and, instead of trying to realize God, they sought to acquire small physical powers with the aid of the Tantrika rites. This marked the origin of grotesque ghost and demon worship and led to the abominations which we find in the Tantras of today. Hence in every Tantra one meets with a higher and a lower form of worship, and every one chooses according to his taste.

The main idea of the Tantras, then, is the deification of the objects of the senses, which ever lure man and bind him in an endless chain of births and deaths, preventing his realization of God. They seek to accustom the struggling soul to look upon these sense-objects as visible representations of the Lord, so that his inordinate attachment to them may be curbed. According to the qualifications of the aspirants, the Tantras prescribed three different modes of practice. They are called Pashubhava, Virabhava and Divyabhava—or animal, heroic, and divine attitudes—in an ascending order. In the devotee of the first type there is a predominance of animal propensities. For him the instruction is that he should avoid all objects of temptation as far as he can, and engage himself in Japa and such other practices with strict regard to purity. In the second class of aspirants, who are comparatively advanced, the devotion to God supersedes the cravings of the senses, and the sense-attractions only heighten the longing for God. They are advised to live in the midst of temptations and try to concentrate on the Lord, unshaken by the jarring elements of the outside world. The third and highest type of Sadhaka is he who is far above the reach of the sense-impulses, who has been swept away from them by a tidal wave of yearning for God-realization, and to whom the practice of truth, forgiveness, compassion, contentment, and such

other attributes have become as natural as respiration. From the above the readers will perceive that the practices of the Tantras bear fruit only when the aspirant makes self-control the bed-rock of his endeavours.

The Tantrika influence permeates every system of worship in India at the present day, including Vaishnavism. Only, the Vaishnavite teachers have introduced certain changes in the worship of the Tantras which are worth nothing. They consider dualistic teachings more beneficial to men, and accordingly have laid stress only on that portion of the Tantrika rites, viz their theory of Mantras and external worship. Into this worship they have infused a new spirit and advise people to serve the Lord according to the promptings of their hearts. The Tantrika gods purify the offerings made to them by merely looking at them; and the devotee by partaking of this consecrated food gradually becomes purer in mind. The Vaishnava reformers taught not only that the gods take the essence of those offerings, but that, in certain cases depending on the devotion of the aspirant, they may also partake of the material offering as well. Amongst the many changes these teachers introduced into the method of worship, the most important was the emphasis they laid on the preliminary course of Tantrika worship, Pashubhava, and they gave strict injunctions about purity being observed in every act of the aspirant—in his food, mode of life, and everything. They also laid great stress on Japa or repetition of the Lord's name as a means to God-realization.

But in course of time evils crept into this cult also. Forgetting the inner significance of the masters' teachings, the followers adopted measures to suit their own tastes. The Acharyas had cited the great attraction between a lover and his mistress as an example to emulate in their quest after God. But they went to the length of carrying it into actual practice, debasing the old, pure form of worship with their own tendencies. It is the same story everywhere.

From the above sketch another thing will have struck the reader. It is this, that for the criticisms usually levelled against the Tantras—or for the matter of that, any abused form of practice—not the Tantras, but the innate tendency of man to gravitate towards enjoyment is responsible. The Tantrika rites can be practised without wine or sex-indulgence, as is amply

proved in the life of Sri Ramakrishna. Evidently it was to equip him as a supreme teacher for modern times that the Divine Mother made him undergo the Tantrika practices.

It has already been stated that the Brahmani, from the very first, bore a motherly affection towards Sri Ramakrishna. Though she believed in the divinity of Sri Ramakrishna, yet under the promptings of motherly solicitude she forgot the aspect of grandeur in the Master, and treated him as a son. But she never forgot the divine mandate she had received to deliver her message to him, and she did her best to act as spiritual guide to Sri Ramakrishna.

But Sri Ramakrishna himself, as he stated later on, undertook this new course of Sadhana only after he had sought and received the permission of the Divine Mother. He set himself to it with the zeal characteristic of him. The Brahmani collected the rare ingredients necessary for the Sadhana and brought them to Dakshineswar. Two Asanas or seats were made, according to the Tantrika books, one in the Panchavati and another under the Bael tree, at the northern extremity of the garden. Referring to this period the Master would afterwards say, "The Brahmani would go during the day to places far from Dakshineswar and collect the various rare things mentioned in the Tantrika scriptures. At nightfall she would ask me to come to one of the seats. I would go, and after performing the worship of the Mother Kali I would begin to meditate according to her directions. As soon as I would begin to tell my beads, I would be always overwhelmed with divine fervour and fall into a deep trance. I cannot relate now the varieties of wonderful visions I used to have. They followed each other in quick succession, and the effects of those practices I could feel most tangibly. The Brahmani put me through all the exercises mentioned in the sixty-four principal Tantra books. Most of these were extremely difficult Sadhanas—some of them so dangerous that they cause the devotee to lose his footing and sink into moral degradation. But the infinite grace of the Mother carried me through them unscathed."

The many fiery ordeals through which he passed during this period testify in the highest degree to his complete conquest of his passions. They proved once for all that the Master was firmly established in the eternal truth, and that the passing

phenomena of the world with all their varied charms could not make him deviate from his one-pointed devotion to the Mother. With the utmost swiftness and ease he ascended the steps of this difficult course of exercises till he reached the topmost rung of the ladder. His mind was always pitched to the highest level of spirituality, and from that lofty altitude he could find nothing that did not, somehow or other, remind him of the Mother. The universe appeared before his clarified vision in its true perspective. By the very nature of the Tantrika rites he had to witness scenes which would have tested to the full the fortitude and self-control of the most stalwart of men, but the impression they carried to his mind was always that of divine bliss unalloyed by any worldly taint. To him, as he floated in a limitless ocean of divine beatitude, there remained nothing evil. The Brahmani declared that her divine disciple had attained perfection in this system of Yoga and had passed through its extreme tests successfully, a thing which very few Sadhakas indeed could do. Throughout he kept intact his ideal of motherhood in all women, and never partook of wine. Woman, to him, was always the emblem of the Divine Mother, and the very mention of the word Karana,¹ the technical term for wine, would suggest to his mind the great Mother of the universe, the First Cause, and inebriate him with a divine joy which made him forget all about the world.

At this time he lost the sense of distinction between holy and unholy. Even a street-girl reminded him of the Mother. Words grossly offensive to the ordinary man appeared to him as but a group of letters—and every letter, he believed in accordance with the verdict of the Shastras, was a symbol of the Divine Mother. Nay, these would sometimes throw him into Samadhi—as was repeatedly observed later—on account of their suggestion of the Blissful Mother. He would find himself wrapped in the flames of knowledge, both inside and out. But his most remarkable experience during this period was that of the upward march of the Kundalini Shakti. Sri Ramakrishna afterwards described it thus in his own inimitable way: "Something rises with a tingling sensation from the feet to the head. So long as it does not reach the brain I remain conscious, but

¹The primary meaning of the word Karana is cause. By usage it has come to mean wine as well.

the moment it does so, I am dead to the outside world. Even the functions of the eyes and the ears come to a stop, and speech is out of the question. Who should speak? The very distinction between 'I' and 'thou' vanishes. Sometimes I think I shall tell you everything about what I see and feel when that mysterious power rises up through the spinal column. When it has come up to this, or even this (pointing to the heart and the throat), it is possible to speak, which I do. But the moment it has gone above this (pointing to the throat), somebody stops my mouth, as it were, and I am adrift. I make up my mind to relate to you what I feel when the Kundalini goes beyond the throat, but as I think over it, up goes the mind at a bound, and there is an end of the matter!" Many a time did the Master attempt to describe this state, but failed every time. One day he was determined to tell and went on until the power reached the throat. Then pointing to the sixth centre, opposite the junction of the eyebrows, he said, "When the mind reaches this point one catches a vision of the Paramatman and falls into Samadhi. Only a thin, transparent veil intervenes between the Jiva and the Paramatman. He then sees like this—," and as he attempted to explain it in detail he fell into Samadhi. When his mind came down a little he tried again, and again he was immersed in Samadhi! After repeated fruitless attempts he said with tears in his eyes, "Well, I sincerely wish to tell you everything, but Mother won't let me do so. She gagged me!"

Referring to the different ways in which the Kundalini rises to the brain, the Master often said, "Well, that which rises to the brain with a tingling sensation does not always follow the same kind of movement. The scriptures speak of its having five kinds of motion. First, the ant-like motion; one feels a slow creeping sensation from the feet upwards, like a row of ants creeping on with food in their mouth. When it reaches the head, the Sadhaka falls into Samadhi. Second, the frog-like motion; just as frogs make two or three short jumps in quick succession and then stop for a while to proceed again in the same way, so something is felt advancing from the feet to the brain. When this reaches the brain the man goes into Samadhi. Third, the serpentine motion; as snakes lie quietly, straight or coiled up, but as soon as they find a victim, or are frightened, they run in a zigzag motion, in like manner the 'coiled up'

power rushes to the head, and this produces Samadhi. Fourth, the bird-like motion : just as birds in their flight from one place to another take to their wings and fly, sometimes a little high and sometimes low, but never stop till they reach their destination, so that power reaches the brain and Samadhi ensues. Fifth and last, the monkey-like motion: as monkeys going from one tree to another take a leap from one branch to another and thus clear the distance in two or three bounds, so the Yogi feels the Kundalini go to the brain and produce a trance."

These experiences he would explain at other times from the Vedantic standpoint as follows: "The Vedanta speaks of seven planes, in all of which the Sadhaka has a particular kind of vision. The human mind has a natural tendency to confine its activities to the three lower centres—the highest being opposite the navel—and therefore is content with the satisfaction of the common appetites such as eating and so forth. But when it reaches the fourth centre, that is, the one opposite the heart, the man sees a divine effulgence. From this state, however, he often lapses back to the three lower centres. When the mind comes to the fifth centre, opposite the throat, the Sadhaka cannot speak of anything but God. While I was in this state I would feel as though struck violently on the head if anybody spoke of worldly topics before me. I would hide myself in the Panchavati where I was safe. I would fly at the sight of worldly-minded people, and relatives appeared to me like a yawning chasm from which there was no escape if I once fell. I felt suffocated in their presence—almost to the point of death, and would be relieved only when I left them. Even from this position a man may slip down. So he has to be on his guard. But he is above all fear when his mind reaches the sixth centre—opposite the junction of the eyebrows. He gets the vision of the Paramatman and remains always in Samadhi. There is only a thin transparent veil between this and the Sahasrara or the highest centre. He is then so near the Paramatman that he imagines he is merged in Him. But really he is not. From this state the mind can come down to the fifth, or at the most, to the fourth centre, but not below that. The ordinary Sadhakas, classed as 'Jivas', cannot come down from this state. After remaining constantly in Samadhi for twenty-one days, they break that thin veil and become one with the Lord for ever. This

eternal union of the Jiva and the Paramatman in the Sahasrara is known as going into the seventh plane."

Sri Ramakrishna also saw the Ultimate Cause of the universe as a large luminous triangle which was giving birth every moment to an infinite number of universes. He often heard the Anahata—a great solemn sound like the Om, produced by the conglomeration of the infinite variety of sounds in the universe. Some say that they heard from the Master himself that he could understand at this time the language of beasts and birds.

As an added result of his spiritual realization, he had free use of the eight Siddhis or supernatural power which make man a god—almost omnipotent. But the Mother showed him in a vision that for a real devotee these powers were worthless. From that time he always thought of them with repugnance and used to warn his devotees against them.

It was at this time that he had a vision of the Divine Maya—the inscrutable way in which the Lord brings about the projection, preservation, and dissolution of the Universe. He saw a woman of exquisite beauty ascend from the Ganga and slowly approach the Panchavati. Presently he noticed that she was about to be a mother. In a short time she gave birth to a lovely child and was nursing the babe with the utmost tenderness. A moment later he observed that she was no longer tender, but had assumed a terrible aspect. She put the child between her grim jaws and crushed it to pieces ! Swallowing it she again hid herself in the Ganga ! This is the way the Divine Enchanter hypnotises the world again and again with the phenomena of birth, growth, and death, and it perceives not Him who befools it with this never-ending game.

He also saw innumerable goddesses ; some of them talked to him and advised him in various ways. He used to say that though all of them possessed exceptional beauty, yet Shodashi or Rajarajeshwari surpassed all others in loveliness.

As a result of his success in the Tantrika practices, he became like a child. He could not keep on the wearing cloth or even the sacred thread. In spite of him they would drop off.

For some years from now, his complexion was so beautiful that he attracted attention everywhere. He used to wear a gold amulet on his arm, and it could hardly be distinguished from

the golden colour of his body. Sri Ramakrishna himself said, "People used to stare at the loveliness of this form. The chest and face were always flushed, and the whole body seemed to be luminous. To escape public notice I had to wrap a stout sheet round my body. I prayed to Mother, 'Take back Thy outward beauty, Mother, and give me instead Thy inner beauty, and purity of the spirit.' I used to stroke the body gently and repeat, 'Dive inward.' After a long time the exterior became dull as it is now."

The revelation came to him about this time that later on many devotees would seek his guidance in spiritual matters. He spoke about this to Mathur, Hriday, and others. Mathur rejoiced and said, "Very well, we shall all be happy in your company."

The most remarkable feature about Sri Ramakrishna's Tantrika Sadhana is that he attained perfection in every course in an incredibly short time—three days being sufficient. Needless to say, it was because he had already realized the Mother of the universe that all subsequent Sadhanas became so easy. It was like the case of a master musician who feels himself at home, no matter how difficult is the music he is called upon to play. Not only was Sri Ramakrishna's perfection in this Sadhana unique and unprecedented, but it is also to him that the restoration of the purity of the ancient Tantrika practices was due. Therein lay his greatness.

IN THE COMPANY OF DEVOTEES AND SCHOLARS

The reader will remember that the Brahmani was commissioned to convey a divine message to two other devotees. She would often say to the Master, "If you are willing, I shall write to them to come here." One day he gave her the permission, and in due course Chandra came. The Master was invited that day to visit the Brahmani, though she had kept Chandra's arrival secret. She and Chandra were talking together when he entered the room. The Brahmani greeted him, and shortly afterwards he fell into a trance. Suddenly he shouted, "Ah, here is Chandra ! Is this not Chandra ?" Then he became motionless. Chandra took hold of his hands and called him loudly by name three or four times. The Master soon came back to normal consciousness. "You seem to know me," said Chandra, "why did you forget me so long ?" "It was the Lord's will," replied the Master. They conversed for some time. Chandra was a great devotee, and Sri Ramakrishna loved him. He said that Chandra was endowed with some of the power of the Lord Vishnu, and it was because of this that he could restore the Master to a normal state of mind from Samadhi so easily. But he looked so insignificant that Hriday seriously doubted his spiritual greatness, and called it in question. Sri Ramakrishna silenced him. But one day when Chandra came to see Sri Ramakrishna the latter said to Hriday, "Just put an ochre cloth on him and then mark the result." When this was done Chandra was overwhelmed with a strange emotion. With a smile Sri Ramakrishna drew Hriday's attention to the transformation. He had acquired, in course of Sadhana, a power through which he could become invisible.

Sri Ramakrishna said that Girija, the other protégé of the Brahmani, had similar powers. He too, came to Dakshineswar. One evening he accompanied the Master to the neighbouring garden of Shambhu Charan Mallick, who was a great admirer of Sri Ramakrishna and thought it a rare privilege to be of service to him. All three were so engrossed in spiritual discussion that they did not notice that evening had deepened into

night. When the Master and Girija turned their steps towards Dakshineswar, it was so dark that they stumbled. Sri Ramakrishna was particularly distressed. Seeing him in this plight, Girija suddenly stopped and said, "Wait a bit, brother, I will give you light." Then he turned his back and from it a powerful light was emitted which lit the way up to the gate of the Kali temple. The Master said that he easily found his way with the help of that light. "But," he concluded the narration, "neither Chandra nor Girija retained those powers. While they lived with me, the Gracious Mother took them away, so that they might turn their attention without distraction to the realization of God."¹

We have already said that the Kali temple of Dakshineswar was a favourite resort of devotees and Sadhus because of its seclusion and holy association, as well as of Rani Rasmani's liberality. Pointing to some of his disciples of English education, Sri Ramakrishna once said, "It was only after the coming of Keshab Chandra Sen that 'Young Bengal' began to frequent this temple; but long before that, innumerable monks, ascetics, and devotees of various orders used to stream in here. They would stop here for a few days on their way to Gangasagar or to Puri. That was before the opening of the railways. At special times, Sadhus of a particular class would congregate in large numbers. Once monks belonging to the Ramayat sect of Vaishnavas began to come. Their devotion, faith, and steadfastness to service beggar all description. It was from one of them that I got Ramlala."² Another Sadhu belonging to this sect had a wonderful faith in the name of God. All he had was a water-pot and a book. The book was his treasure. He worshipped it

¹In the year 1899, soon after the Swami Vivekananda's second departure for the West, a gentleman came to the Belur Math and gave himself out as Chandra. Swami Brahmananda, President, was there at the time. They used to hold long conversations in private. He said that all the prophecies of Sri Ramakrishna about him had come to pass. Only one remained to be fulfilled, and that was the Master's promise to meet him at his death. He used to pass long hours in meditation and prayer at the chapel with tears running down his face. He would gladly relate those incidents of Sri Ramakrishna's life which he knew. He was a plain-looking, quiet man and loved to sit in a retired corner of the Math. The first time he entered the chapel he was extremely moved on seeing the photograph of Sri Ramakrishna and addressed him as brother. He said that he had made pilgrimages to various holy places in India. Swami Brahmananda invited him to live in the Math permanently, but he went home on business and did not return. He probably was the 'Chandra' referred to above.

²The incidents about Ramlala are described in the next chapter.

daily with flowers and from time to time pored over it. After I knew him, one day I pressed him hard to let me have a look at it. On opening it I found on every page only two words—Om Rama—written in bold red letters. 'What is the use,' he explained to me, 'of reading a library of books? God is the one origin of the Vedas, the Puranas and all other scriptures, and there is no difference between Him and His name. What is contained in the four Vedas, the eighteen Puranas and in all other sacred books is comprised in one of His names. So I am satisfied with His name alone.' Such was his tremendous faith in the Lord's name! So people of this class continued to come for some time. When their visits became less frequent a different class of men, monks of the Paramahansa order, began to come in—not vagabonds, but real Sadhus. There would be a regular crowd in this room day and night, and the one theme of their discussion was Vedanta—the nature of Brahman and Maya and all that. I was then suffering from a terrible attack of dysentery, and Hriday was nursing me. But I always followed those discussions, and when they were unable to come to any decision on a mooted point, someone from within this (pointing to his own body) would throw out a suggestion in simple words, and everyone would be satisfied."

The Master sometimes related interesting tales about some of the monks he had thus met. He said, "One day a Sadhu came, with a serene light on his countenance. He would sit for hours at a time smiling to himself. Coming out of his room mornings and evenings, he would look at the sky, the Ganga and the trees, and raising his arms dance with joy. Sometimes he would roll in laughter and shout, 'Bravo! What fun! How beautiful is this projected universe!' That was his prayer and meditation after he had tasted of the sweetness of Divine Bliss. I remember another monk who had attained to the highest illumination and yet looked like a madman. Naked, covered with dust, with long hair and nails, and a nasty quilt-like cloth round his body, he looked like a ghoul. He stood before the Kali temple and chanted a hymn to the Mother with such fervour that the whole temple shook, as it were, and the Mother seemed delighted. Then he went to eat with the beggars. But even they turned him out because of his repulsive appearance. Then I found him taking the leavings of the beggars' meal with some

dogs, from the heap of discarded leaf-plates. He had one of his arms around a dog's neck, and man and dog were eating from the same leaf. The dog was quite at home with him. Watching this scene I was inwardly horrified, lest I too should become the same. I came away and said to Hriday that he was not an ordinary lunatic, that his was the madness of Knowledge. At this Hriday ran after him and found him going out of the temple compound. He followed him to some distance, begging for some instructions as to how he might realize God. At first the monk said nothing, but finding Hriday persistent he stopped, and pointing to some ditch-water on the roadside said, 'When this ditch-water and the water of the Ganga appear just the same to you, then you will realize God.' Hriday wanted to hear something more and prayed to be allowed to follow him as a disciple. But the monk went his way without replying. When he found that Hriday persisted in following him, he took up a brick to throw at him and put him to flight. Then he quickly disappeared, and Hriday lost track of him. Great Sadhus often live like that to escape public notice. 'That man was a real Paramahansa.'

Then the Master described the characteristics of a Paramahansa: "Scripture says that he lives sometimes like a child, sometimes like a ghoul, and sometimes like a madman. He allows children to be near him and tries to imbibe their simplicity and non-attachment. You must have noticed how glad a child is when his mother gives him a new piece of cloth. If you ask him for it, he will refuse to give it and say, 'No, I won't give it. Mother has given it to me.' And he will hold the cloth tightly and watch lest you should snatch it from him, as if his whole soul were on it. But a minute later, if he finds in your hand a toy, not worth even a farthing, he will say, 'Give me that, and I will give you the cloth.' A moment after perhaps he will throw the toy away and run after a flower. He is attached to nothing. A real Jnani is like that."

Some time during this period (1862-1863), Sri Ramakrishna had a desire to supply the devotees with the various requisites of worship, so that they might practise their Sadhana peacefully, and he would have the pleasure of watching it. He spoke about it to Mathur, who forthwith arranged for a large store of goods in the Kali temple to be left completely at the disposal of Sri

Ramakrishna to distribute as he liked. Besides foodstuffs such as rice, flour, ghee, etc., there were blankets, water-pots, and Kamandalus, even the intoxicants commonly in use among the Sadhus and the Tantrikas, of whom there was a large influx at that time. The Tantrikas would form mystic rings, to which they often invited him to join. Sometimes he was made the leader. At first they asked him to taste the consecrated wine, but later on, finding that he could not take it, and that mere mention of it was sufficient to induce religious intoxication in him, they desisted. In deference to the custom prevailing in these sittings, Sri Ramakrishna would either touch a drop of wine to his forehead or smell it, or at the most put a drop on his tongue with his finger. He noticed that there were some who after drinking would sit for meditation and become absorbed in it; but most of them drank because they liked wine, and instead of praying became boisterous. So he stopped the supply of wine altogether.

The meeting of these exponents of different ideas with Sri Ramakrishna was of great significance. True spiritual fervour is extremely contagious. No sooner had Sri Ramakrishna attained perfection in following a particular form of Sadhana than devotees of that type came to Dakshineswar. They exchanged ideas with him, and the tales of his tremendous realizations made them desirous of instruction and of attaining the same results. The ideas of practical spirituality which had their origin in the Prophet of Dakshineswar, were disseminated through these Sadhus to their own disciples and followers, thus laying the train for a great spiritual upheaval throughout the country. Even those fortunate persons whom he accepted as teachers, were enabled to realize subtle truths which had hitherto been to them more or less matters of theory or intellectual speculation.

We learn from the Master's own declaration, that as soon as he finished with the Tantrika Sadhana under the guidance of the Brahmani, various Tantrika devotees from different parts of the country were attracted to Dakshineswar. This happened again when he achieved perfection in the Vaishnava ways of Sadhana as well as in that of the Advaita.

The advent of a spiritual genius like Sri Ramakrishna augured well for the regeneration of India. At no other period of her history was India threatened with such utter ruin as in

the middle of the last century. Various disruptive forces were about to extinguish her ancient culture and civilization. This was manifest in all phases of her life—social, political, and economic. Religion, the backbone of Indian life, had been forgotten, and the worst propensities of human nature—sloth, hatred, sham, and sensuality—took its place and paved the way for the rankest materialism. For a moment everything seemed to be lost. But the safety of the world demanded that India must live, its philosophy should be as a heaven of peace for world-tossed souls. To prepare herself for this great task, she needed spiritual reorganization. Nothing less than a spiritual giant like Sri Ramakrishna could do this. To quote a Brahmo writer¹: “A living evidence of the depth and sweetness of Hindu religion is this good and holy man. He has wholly controlled his flesh. He is full of soul, full of the reality of religion, full of joy, full of blessed purity. As a Siddha Hindu ascetic he is a witness of the falsehood and emptiness of the world. His witness appeals to the profoundest heart of every Hindu. He has no other thought, no other occupation, no other relation, no other friend in his humble life than his God. That God is more than sufficient for him. His spotless holiness, his deep unspeakable blessedness, his unstudied, endless wisdom, his childlike peacefulness and affection towards all men, his consuming, all-absorbing love for God are his only reward.” In these beautiful lines is summed up the greatness of Sri Ramakrishna. Thus at a most critical moment of Indian history a messenger from Heaven came to bring about India's renaissance.

By instinct, as it were, the genius of the nation knew that its saviour was come. It sent men of renunciation by the hundred, to fill their cups at the overflowing fountain of spirituality at Dakshineswar. They sat at the feet of Sri Ramakrishna, and heard from his lips the tidings of another world. Every man, of whatever denomination, found in him the fulfilment of his ideal. He showered his treasures unstintedly on them. Himself a Sadhaka of the highest type, he guided different people along their respective paths, without upsetting their modes of thought or trying to make them think alike. All great teachers do this. They supplement but do not supplant. By their own Sadhana they revive forgotten spiritual truths and again pro-

¹Reverend P. C. Mazumdar.

claim them to the world, according to the needs of the time. And the great prophet of India realized that the different forms of her religion promulgated by its ancient sages are but so many gems in the crown of Indian spirituality—complementary, not antagonistic. And having demonstrated for himself that the truth is the basis of all religious methods, he proclaimed the message of the new era—devotion to one's own ideal and sympathy for all others.

Among the many devotees and scholars who came in contact with Sri Ramakrishna at different periods, some took initiation from him, others were benefited in different ways by his influence, as we have seen in the cases of Vaishnav Charan and Gauri Pundit. The latter was deeply impressed by the experience of his first visit to Sri Ramakrishna. Some years later, about 1870, we find him again at Dakshineswar, studying at the feet of Sri Ramakrishna. The spirit of renunciation began to dominate his life. Disgusted with scholarship, prestige, and powers, he was gradually realizing that devotion to God was the only thing worth while in the world, and he determined to consecrate his life to realizing Him. All his former love of argument and debate was gone. He realized the folly of dissipating his energy thus instead of using it in search of truth. He had allowed many opportunities to slip by; now he was determined to devote every moment of the few years left to God-realization.

Some months passed. The Pundit's long absence from home made his people anxious. They had heard a report that a strange transformation had come over his mind since he had come in contact with an insane Sadhu at Dakshineswar. So they wrote to him frequently urging his return. Gauri had a suspicion that they might come to Dakshineswar to take him away. After much thought he hit upon a plan and one day, prostrating himself before Sri Ramakrishna, with tears in his eyes he asked leave to go. "Well, Gauri" said the Master, "what is the matter? Where are you going?" With folded hands Gauri replied, "Bless me that my desire may be fulfilled, and that I may not return to the world before realizing God." After that, he disappeared.

Another man of this type came to Sri Ramakrishna—Pundit Narayan Shastri from Rajputana, an orthodox Brahmin of the old type. He had moulded his life according to the ancient

Hindu ideal, and for twenty-five years lived a Brahmacharin's life in the house of his Gurus, in the course of which he became versed in different scriptures. It was his ambition to acquire the knowledge of the six schools of Indian philosophy. After studying five of them under various distinguished scholars of Northern India, he came to Bengal to learn the Nyaya philosophy from the Pundits of Nadia. The Maharaja of Jaipur hearing of his erudition wished to make him chief Pundit of his court at a high salary, but, being desirous of prosecuting his studies still further, he declined the offer and spent seven years at Nadia, assimilating the complex philosophy of the Nyaya school, after which he came to Calcutta on his way home.

Unlike the generality of scholars, Narayan Shastri was not content with the study of books. Sincere and devoted, he knew that mere reading of philosophy did not imply assimilation of the subject; he saw that realization and book-lore were quite distinct from each other, and that the former was infinitely greater than the latter. Occasionally the idea came to him that he should devote himself exclusively to the aim of all philosophies—the realization of Truth. But he decided to wait until he had finished his studies. It was his good fortune to meet the saint of Dakshineswar when this was done.

He was greatly attracted. In order to study under Sri Ramakrishna he determined to stay at Dakshineswar. The more he saw of him, the more he loved and revered him. The Master was glad to have such a sincere disciple, and spent hours with him in spiritual discussion.

Narayan Shastri had read in the Vedanta about the seven planes of spiritual development, and how as the mind of the devotee ascends higher and higher, it sees strange visions, until it reaches the last plane, where oneness with the Brahman is realized through Nirvikalpa Samadhi, and the bondage of ignorance is left behind for ever. These were matters of intellectual speculation to him, and such words as "supersensuous perception" and "Samadhi" were vague ideas to him. Now he saw a man in whose life these subtle truths were realized facts, enacted time and again before his very eyes. "What a strange thing!" the Pundit thought: "Where can I find a better teacher to explain the truths of the scriptures? I must not lose this golden opportunity. Nothing is so certain as death. I must make a

serious attempt to realize the Lord and be free." Every day this thought dissociated him more and more from the world. With a rare spirit of humility he sat at the feet of Sri Ramakrishna and tried to assimilate his words of wisdom. Often he said to himself, "Look at this saint ! He has realized the goal of life, and armed with that knowledge, how calm he is ! Even death has lost its sting for him. The Upanishads declare that whatever such persons wish, comes to pass without fail, and those who take refuge with them soon reach the end of their earthly desires and attain to Illumination. Why should I not make him the polestar of my life ?" But he feared to be rejected as unfit by Sri Ramakrishna, and days passed by whilst he was trying to gather courage to ask the Master to become his Guru.

In the mean time an incident took place which is worth mentioning here. Michael Madhusudan Dutt, the great Bengali poet, a Christian and Barrister-at-Law, was called to Dakshineswar by Dwaraka Nath, son of Mathur, for consultation about a law-suit. Hearing of Sri Ramakrishna, he expressed a desire to see him. The Master was requested to come to Madhusudan. He did not wish to go and sent Hriday instead. Dwaraka Nath again asked the Master to come. This time he accepted the invitation and went with Narayan Shastri. The Shastri had a talk with the poet in Sanskrit, in the course of which he asked him why he had embraced Christianity. The poet is said to have replied that he had been compelled to do so for pecuniary reasons. "What !" replied Narayan Shastri in a reproachful tone, "for such a trifle you gave up your precious religion ! You should have preferred starvation." The Pundit was disgusted and did not talk to him further. The poet then implored Sri Ramakrishna to give some advice.

"Somebody is pressing my lips," replied the Master, "I cannot utter a word."

"I am your humble servant," said the poet, "so why should you not favour me ?"

"That is not the point. I want to speak with you, but somebody is pressing my mouth and preventing me from speaking," said the Master.

The poet was naturally mortified. A few minutes later, however, Sri Ramakrishna sang some well-known devotional songs, which consoled Madhusudan. Narayan Shastri expressed

his disgust at the poet's conduct by writing in charcoal in Bengali characters on the wall in front of Sri Ramakrishna's room that it was foolish to give up one's religion for the sake of the stomach. This used to attract the notice of visitors long after the incident.

One day Narayan Shastri met Sri Ramakrishna when he was alone and begged to be initiated into Sannyasa. The Master yielded to his importunities. Soon after he bade adieu to Dakshineswar. Nothing further is definitely known of him. Some say he went to the Vasishtha Ashrama in Assam, determined to lay down his life if need be in the struggle for realization. He probably died there. Sri Ramakrishna often spoke of him to his devotees.

Not content with receiving Sadhus and other devotees, Sri Ramakrishna, without waiting for an invitation, would often seek those who were known for their quest after Truth, to talk with them. He did not care whether or not he would be well received; his sole concern was to meet different devotees and to find out how far they had progressed towards their ideal. He never failed to estimate a man according to his deserts—be he of humble or high position. Pundit Padmalochan, Devendra Nath Tagore, Bhagavan Das Babaji and Swami Dayananda Saraswati were some of those he visited about this time. We shall tell of his meeting with Padmalochan.

Pundit Padmalochan Tarkalankar was the court-Pundit of the Maharaja of Burdwan and a great scholar. After mastering the Nyaya philosophy he went to Banaras to study the Vedanta. There he lived with a teacher till he mastered it, when he returned to Bengal. His fame had already spread far and wide, and the Maharaja of Burdwan engaged his services as a scholar. Soon he became the chief of the Pundits of the court and a recognised authority. Coupled with his great scholarship were austerity, liberal-mindedness, devotion, and a scrupulous regard for the ancient Hindu customs. The combination of scholarship with love for God is so seldom seen in the same person that one possessing it stands out from his fellows. When Sri Ramakrishna heard of him he wished to meet him. He expressed his desire to Mathur and repeatedly asked him to make some arrangement to bring about the interview. Realizing that life is transient and that whatever one desires to do must be done

at once, he showed a child-like eagerness for the meeting. Mathur was about to send him to Burdwan, when news was brought that the Pundit had come to Calcutta to regain his health and was staying at a garden of Ariadaha. The Master sent Hriday to find out if this were true. Hriday confirmed the news and said that the Pundit was equally anxious to meet Sri Ramakrishna.

A day was fixed, and in the afternoon Sri Ramakrishna, accompanied by Hriday, went in a boat to see the Pundit. He was very cordially received. After exchanging a few words, Sri Ramakrishna sang some devotional songs in his characteristic way, which deeply moved the scholar. He was much impressed by the frequent trances into which the Master fell in his presence, and considered himself fortunate to have met Sri Ramakrishna. Addressing those present he remarked, "What I could not acquire by reading cart-loads of books, he has got without turning over a single page, and infinitely more besides!" After telling Hriday that he regarded Sri Ramakrishna as divine, he said to the Master, "I shall read out to you my written discussion on God with Utsavananda Goswami and others. Then my labours will be fruitful." Padmalochan was strongly attracted by Sri Ramakrishna, who in his turn was deeply impressed by the Pundit's sincerity and wisdom. This pleasant meeting led to several subsequent ones, in the course of which the Pundit became convinced that his first impression of Sri Ramakrishna was true, and came to have implicit faith in him. Sri Ramakrishna used to tell the following interesting anecdote illustrative of the Pundit's simplicity. Once there was a dispute in the court of the Maharaja of Burdwan as to the comparative greatness of Shiva and Vishnu. One party tried to prove Shiva was the greater, while the other held the opposite view. When the dispute was at its height, Padmalochan as chief Pundit was called in to give his verdict. After hearing both he said, "Neither I nor any one in my line has ever seen Shiva or Vishnu. So how can I tell you which is the greater? But if you wish to know what the scriptures say on the point, the Shaiva scriptures give the foremost place to Shiva, while the Vaishnava scriptures extol Vishnu. Each is great to His respective devotees." Both parties were reconciled by this opinion.

In the course of the practice of Tantrika Sadhanas Pundit

Padmalochan acquired some extraordinary powers. He always kept beside him a vessel full of water and a napkin. Whenever he was formally asked to solve any difficult problem, he would walk a few steps, wash and wipe his face, and then give the matter his consideration. This was done according to the direction of his favoured Deity, and was never omitted, for by it he was made invincible in debate. It was a profound secret, and none, not even his wife, knew of it. There was nothing in this habit to excite anybody's suspicion. Sri Ramakrishna used to say that he came to know of it through the grace of the Divine Mother and one day managed to hide the Pundit's water-vessel and napkin. A question awaited immediate solution and the Pundit, before answering, looked for them. He was surprised to find they were missing. When he found that it was Sri Ramakrishna who had removed them, he was astonished. But his amazement knew no bounds on learning that the Master had purposely done so. He was overwhelmed at the thought that Sri Ramakrishna had fathomed the innermost contents of his mind, and with tears in his eyes sang the praises of the Master, knowing him to be no other than his Chosen Deity. This incident led the Pundit to surrender himself completely at the Master's feet and so greatly strengthened his faith that he said to him (as Sri Ramakrishna himself used to tell his disciple), "As soon as I recover, I shall have all the scholars summoned to a meeting where I shall declare you to be an Incarnation. I should like to see any one with the boldness to challenge my statement."

The following will also give an idea of the Pundit's great regard for Sri Ramakrishna. In the year 1863 Mathur, at an enormous expense, gave to the Brahmins a thousand maunds of rice and other foodstuffs, besides large quantities of gold and silver. He made arrangements for a musical festival of some days' duration, to which Sri Ramakrishna was invited. It is said that Mathur made presents of costly shawls, silk clothing, and hundreds of rupees to the singers, judging their merits by the degree of the Master's satisfaction, as revealed by his trances. Mathur wished to invite Pundit Padmalochan, but he was afraid that being an orthodox Brahmin, the Pundit would refuse. Nevertheless he sent the invitation, but through Sri Ramakrishna. The Master said to Padmalochan, "Will you go

to Rani Rasmani's garden?" "Why not?" replied the Pundit without a moment's hesitation. "With you I can go and dine at even a scavenger's house. Attending a meeting in a Shudra's house is a small matter!"

But Padmalochan had not the opportunity to fulfil his promise. His illness became worse, and finding no relief in Calcutta he resolved to pass his last days at Banaras. So he took leave of Sri Ramakrishna and went to Banaras, where shortly afterwards he died.

In this connection it is worth noting that long after the Pundit's passing, when some of Sri Ramakrishna's disciples and followers openly proclaimed him as an Incarnation, he asked them again and again to desist. Finding his wishes disregarded he said in annoyance, "One of them is a doctor and another the manager of a theatre, and they come here and call me an Incarnation! They think that by doing so they add to my prestige—make me appear great in the eyes of the world. But what do they understand of the significance of an Incarnation? Long, long before their coming here with their new discovery, great authorities like Padmalochan, who spent their whole lives in the study of such subjects and were masters in all or most of the different schools of philosophy, came here and openly proclaimed this (meaning himself) as an Incarnation, time and again, till I became sick of the idea! So what do they mean by repeating this old, old thing!"

Swami Dayananda Saraswati, the founder of the Arya Samaj, once paid a brief visit to Calcutta and stayed at a garden in the suburbs. Though already known as a great scholar, he had not yet made known his doctrines or founded his Samaj. Sri Ramakrishna visited the Swami, and referring to him said to some of his disciples later on, "I went to see him at the garden of Sinthi. He had a little power. I found his chest always red owing to congestion. Day and night he discussed the scriptures. With the help of grammar he went on distorting the meaning of many passages of the Shastras. He seemed to have the ambition of doing something original—starting a new sect."

Another great man whom Sri Ramakrishna met was Pundit Jaynarayan. This was what the Master said about him: "He was a great scholar, but had no trace of egoism in him. He knew beforehand about his own death and prophesied that he

would give up his body at Banaras. It actually came to pass."

Krishnakishore was another great devotee whom Sri Ramakrishna frequently visited. He was a worshipper of Rama and lived at Ariadaha. Referring to him Sri Ramakrishna used to say, "When a state of divine intoxication overpowered me, I could not endure the company of worldly people. I was mad after God and longed to listen to spiritual topics alone. I looked for places where the *Mahabharata*, the *Bhagavata* or the *Adhyatma Ramayana* was to be heard. Occasionally I went to Krishnakishore of Ariadaha to hear him read the *Adhyatma Ramayana*. He had wonderful faith. He had been to Vrindaban. One day feeling very thirsty he came to a well near which a man was standing. He asked the man to draw some water for him. The man replied that he was of low caste and could not do so. Krishnakishore told him to utter the name of Shiva and be at once purified. This he did and drew water from the well and Krishnakishore drank it without any scruple. On another occasion, a Sadhu came to Ariadaha. Wishing to visit him I said to Haladhari, 'Krishnakishore and I are going to see a Sadhu. Will you accompany us?' Haladhari replied, 'What's the use of going to see a mere framework composed of the five elements?' He used to study the Gita and Vedanta, and that was the way he talked. When I told Krishnakishore about it he flew into a rage and said, 'Had he the audacity to speak like that! Is the man who worships God, meditates on Rama, and has sacrificed all for Him to be slighted thus! Haladhari ought to know that the body of a devotee is of spirit all compact.' It was Krishnakishore's belief that once a man took His holy name, he was pure and spotless. Haladhari denied this and said that Ajamila, too, later on practised austerities for God, proving that it was not enough to say Narayana once. This disgusted Krishnakishore so much that he would turn his face away from Haladhari when he met him in the Dakshineswar garden.

"One day he said to me, 'Why have you thrown away your sacred thread?' 'A cyclone of spiritual longing had blown off everything about me. It revolutionized my life. How could I take care of the sacred thread, when even the cloth would not stick to its place?' I said to him, 'If you ever become mad like me, then you will understand it.' It actually happened. He

himself became mad. He would sit alone in a corner of his house and mutter, 'Om'. His people thought he was suffering from a nervous disease and consulted a physician. Krishnakishore said to his physician, 'Well, you may cure me of my illness, but not of saying Om !' He suffered great bereavement when he lost two grown-up sons. One of them, however, died uttering the name of Rama. Krishnakishore said, 'Ah, he should not be mourned as he took Rama's name at death.' But still now and then the afflicted man would burst into tears !"

We shall conclude this chapter with an account of two young devotees about whom Sri Ramakrishna often spoke tenderly. They were frequent visitors to Dakshineswar, presumably about this period, and were named Govinda and Gopal.

Govinda was an oilman's son and lived at Baranagore. Young as he was, he was nevertheless, full of devotion and spent much of his time in the company of Sri Ramakrishna, listening to his recital of his personal experiences and other religious topics. The Master loved him very much and asked him to come to Dakshineswar often. One day the boy sought his permission to bring his friend Gopal with him. Gopal often fell into trances when listening to discussions on spiritual subjects. One day Gopal touched Sri Ramakrishna's feet and took his leave. He said that the world was too much for him, so he was departing from it. For some days the Master had no news of the boys. Then Govinda came and told him that Gopal had passed away. The Master was deeply touched by the news. Shortly after this Govinda, too, breathed his last.

RAMLALA

The incident of Ramlala is one of the most affecting episodes in the life of Sri Ramakrishna, because it shows how the Supreme may be approached and realized through the channel of human sentiment. Through it is demonstrated the truth that God is neither a hard taskmaster nor an eternally receding abstract entity, but the nearest and dearest of all, always willing to make Himself known to His devotees. If we but stretch one hand out to touch Him, He responds with both, so kind and so loving is He !

It was probably about the year 1864 that Jatadhari first came to Dakshineswar. He was an itinerant monk and a devotee of Rama. In his close association with Sri Ramakrishna he was able to guide him in some of the various modes of worship. The Master often said that Jatadhari's love and yearning for God was peerless. Ramlala or the "Child Rama" was his favourite Deity, and he gave himself up to his service. By long meditation and worship Jatadhari had made great progress in spirituality and had been blessed with a wonderful vision of Rama. His mind remained always on a high level of spiritual consciousness. The distractions of the world were left far behind, and he saw in the image, which he always carried about with him, the effulgent form of the young Rama, occasionally at first, but later constantly, so that eventually his beloved Ishta Deva became a living presence to him. The service of Ramlala was his sole preoccupation. He nursed him, fed and played with him, and at night even put him to bed. He forgot everything else—his own personal comfort and pleasure—in this Sadhana.

Jatadhari had never told any one of his vision. But he could not hide it from Sri Ramakrishna. Intimately familiar with the various states of divine consciousness, he discovered Jatadhari's cherished secret. He observed the ecstasy that constantly overpowered the new Sadhu, and invited him to stay at Dakshineswar. He would spend hours with him watching his impassioned devotion to Ramlala.

"The Babaji,"¹ said the Master later to a group of disciples, "was the lifelong devotee of Ramlala, whom he carried wherever he went. He would cook whatever he got by begging and offer it to him. He actually found that Ramlala took the food; sometimes he would demand something else. Again he would act like a spoiled child. Jatadhari was engaged day and night in the service of the image and was in a state of constant bliss. I could see the actions of Ramlala; so I used to spend the whole day with the Babaji to watch him. Days passed in this way, and Ramlala became more and more intimate with me. As long as I remained with Jatadhari, Ramlala was cheerful, but the moment I left, he followed me to my room. No argument would affect him. At first I thought that it might be a hallucination, for how could Ramlala prefer me—practically a stranger—to Jatadhari whose whole life was spent in his service? I argued that I might be deceived once or twice; but this scene was repeated every day. I saw Ramlala as vividly as I see you all—now dancing gracefully before me, now springing on my back, or insisting on being taken up in my arms. Sometimes I would hold him on my lap. He would not remain there, but run to the fields in the sun, pluck flowers from thorny bushes, or jump into the Ganga. I would remonstrate saying, 'Don't run in the sun, your feet will get blistered. Don't remain so long in water, you will catch cold and get fever.' But Ramlala would turn a deaf ear. He would fix his beautiful eyes on me and smile, or like a naughty boy he would go on with his pranks, or pout his lips or make faces at me. Sometimes I would lose my temper and cry, 'Wait, you naughty boy, I am going to beat you black and blue.' I would drag him away, and diverting him with various toys, ask him to play inside the room. But sometimes I lost patience and slapped him. With tearful eyes and trembling lips he would look at me. Oh, what pain I would feel then for having punished him! I would take him in my lap and console him. All those things actually happened."

"One day," Sri Ramakrishna continued, "I was going to bathe. Ramlala insisted on accompanying me. I took him with me. But he would not come out of the water, nor did he heed my remonstrances. Then I got angry, and pressing him under the water said, 'Now play in it as much as you like.' Ah, I saw

¹An appellation for Vaishnava Sadhus.

him struggling for breath. Then repenting of my act I took him up in my arms. Another incident pained me greatly, and I wept bitterly for it. He insisted on having something which I could not supply. To divert him, I gave him some parched rice not well husked. As he was chewing them, I found his tender tongue was scratched. The sight was too much for me. I took him on my lap and cried out, 'Mother Kaushalya used to feed you with cream or butter with the greatest care, and I was so thoughtless as to give you this coarse stuff !' " In recounting the incident he was overpowered by the same feeling and wept so bitterly that his hearers were moved to tears. But they got a faint glimpse of the Master's impassioned love for Ramlala.

"Sometimes the Babaji," the Master went on, "after cooking his food could not find Ramlala. Being sorely distressed, he would run to my room and find Ramlala playing with me. In wounded pride the Sadhu would say, 'The food is ready, and I have been searching for you, and here you are playing at your ease ! Well, that is your nature. You do whatever you like. You have no feelings. Hard and unkind, you left your parents and went to the forest.¹ Your father died of a broken heart, but you did not return even to see him on his death-bed.' Scolding thus he would take Ramlala away and feed him. The Babaji stayed here for a long time, because Ramlala would not go away from me, and the Babaji could not leave behind his dearly beloved Ramlala.

"One day Jatadhari came to me weeping and said, 'Ramlala out of his infinite grace has fulfilled my desire. He has revealed himself to me in the form I prefer, but he has told me that he will not go, leaving you behind. But I am not distressed on that account. I am filled with joy to see him live here happily and play with you. I am satisfied when he is happy. I shall gladly leave him with you and go my way. It gladdens my heart to think that he is happy in your company.' With these words Jatadhari left Ramlala with me and bade adieu to Dakshineswar. Ever since Ramlala has been here."

This in brief is the story of Sri Ramakrishna's Vatsalya form of devotion to Sri Rama. Human love is but a faint reflection of divine love. Our attachments are usually prompted by worldly considerations and depend upon time, place or cir-

¹ The allusion is to one of the famous episodes in the *Ramayana*.

cumstances ; divine love is constant, undecaying and unconditioned. Even death cannot intervene between God and his devotee. God is very near, but our vision is so blurred by a thousand petty desires that He seems far off. Thousands of people may walk over a rich subterranean mine without dreaming of the treasures hidden underfoot. Only an expert gets the clue to their existence and digs them out. Thousands of men and women have seen Ramlala, but to every one of them he is nothing but the little metal image ; if they are told of this episode in Sri Ramakrishna's life, they would consider it a poetical fancy. But an ocean of difference lies between the ordinary mentality and that of Sri Ramakrishna. Which of us can say that he has pined sincerely for God and had no response ? Which of us can satisfy himself that he has searched for God with all his heart and soul, and yet has not felt Him speaking to him as did Ramlala to Sri Ramakrishna ? The world is full of much talk with no practice. But God exists for all that. If the experiences of a single devotee are true, then in spite of all assertions to the contrary, God is true—sensed by others with the necessary zeal. He always reveals Himself to the true devotee in the form most pleasing to the devotee. Yes, we can see God and that more intensely than we see the world. He is the only shining Reality, of which all else is but a passing shadow. Seek Him in the right spirit, and you shall find Him. The trouble is that we are unwilling to go through the necessary discipline. For a material thing we can patiently wait for years, but in this most momentous of pursuits we will not wait. Hence our failure. It was because Sri Ramakrishna applied himself to the task with wonderful sincerity, renunciation, patience, and one-pointed zeal that he achieved success in incredibly short time. There is no record in spiritual history to equal it.

If we inquire why after the completion of his Tantrika Sadhana, Sri Ramakrishna was attracted to the Vaishnava ways of worship, of which his experiences with Ramlala formed a part, the reasons were various. The first and foremost was the combination of different qualities in his character. Stern as the most austere of Jnanis, he was at the same time loving as a Bhakta. Though a hard taskmaster and strict disciplinarian, he was as solicitous for the welfare of his disciples as a mother. These attributes are not contradictory when viewed from the

highest standpoint, for they represent different attitudes of the mind towards the Truth. Usually a Sadhaka is satisfied with the realization of only one aspect of God. But Sri Ramakrishna desired to know Him in every aspect. He knew no exhaustion, no satiety. He had scarcely attained the goal of one mode of worship when he took up another ; his whole life was spent in seeking God in different ways and realizing Him in diverse aspects. Secondly, it will be remembered that he was born of a Vaishnava family, his father being a devoted follower of Raghuvir. Born and reared in such environments, Sri Ramakrishna naturally leaned towards Vaishnavism. Lastly, the Brahmani who was his teacher in the Tantrika Sadhana, was, as we know, herself a great Vaishnava devotee. So it was quite natural that Sri Ramakrishna should be attracted towards Vaishnavism.

During the first four years of his Sadhana, we saw him adopting the calm and placid attitude towards the Deity (Shanta), or that of a servant to his master (Dasya). We remember his following in the footsteps of Hanuman and his being blessed with the vision of Sita. Sometimes also he adopted the attitude of a friend towards the Divinity (Sakhya), in the manner of Shridama, Sudama, and the other companions of Sri Krishna. We hear of his attaining perfection in these different modes of Vaishnava discipline. Now he wished to try the two remaining modes of worship—the relation of parent to child (Vatsalya), and that of a girl to her lover (Madhura).

While practising Vatsalya Sadhana Sri Ramakrishna became possessed with the idea that he was a woman. He was helped in this through his inherent tenderness—a feminine quality. He forgot his masculine nature, and his speech and gestures so resembled a woman's that the women of Mathur's family, with whom he associated now, accepted him as one of themselves. We find him at this time worshipping the Divine Mother as Her handmaiden, fanning Her with great care or performing other similar services. His meeting Jatadhari at this juncture lent an added impetus to these tendencies and decided his particular form of worship, filling him with an absorbing love for the child Rama. He felt the same motherly love for the Divine Child as did the queen Kaushalya for her boy. Before Jatadhari left Dakshineswar he initiated Sri Ramakrishna into

the Vatsalya form of worship. With characteristic zeal Sri Ramakrishna plunged headlong into this Sadhana, determined to reach the goal in the shortest time possible. In a few days he was not only blessed with a constant vision of Sri Ramachandra as the Divine Child, but he also found that He who appeared before him as the son of King Dasharatha, also pervaded every being—that He projected the universe and transcended it in His aspect of Pure Brahman, the One without a name, form, or attribute. So through following the prescribed forms of Vatsalya, he reached the same goal which he had hitherto attained by his own unaided efforts.

LOVE TRANSCENDENTAL

Sri Ramakrishna now took up the next and highest form of Vaishnava Sadhana—the Madhura Bhava or the relation between a mistress and her lover. In a previous chapter we outlined the principal features of the five forms of Vaishnava worship, all hinging on the potent factor of human life—Love. The reader must have noticed that in this ascending scale of worship the Sadhaka is less and less impressed with the grandeur of his Ideal ; as he becomes freer and more intimate with the object of his adoration, only the sweetness of the relation interests him. Considered thus, the Madhura Bhava, representative of the closest union between the worshipper and the object of worship, is assuredly the highest of these practices, though through every one of them the aspirant may achieve oneness with his Beloved. That such oneness even produces physical transformation in the devotee is repeatedly borne out by the evidence of spiritual history. In the conjugal relation with the Deity of which we are speaking, the devotee thinks of his Beloved with the same intensity as a mistress dwells on the charms of her lover. Here there can be no artificial barrier, no obstructing social or moral tie. She pursues her object with the whole energy of her soul and is happy only when she has attained her end. This phase of religious practice was developed by Sri Chaitanya and his followers. In the Puranas, the religious history of ancient India, we find a beautiful expression of this form of worship in the Vrindaban episode of Sri Krishna's life. The milkmaids of Vrindaban were mad for Sri Krishna ; they sought no personal ends ; they did not care for their own happiness ; their one object was to please Sri Krishna—the embodiment of beauty in all its phase—to whom they had surrendered their body, mind, and soul. The imagery used in the Puranas to describe this state of mind has, of necessity, been clothed in human language, and taken literally or superficially, seems sensual in the extreme. But as expressions of a condition of bliss far beyond the range of the sense (as we have been assured by Sri Ramakrishna they really are), they may be properly interpreted in one way alone—as the rhapsodies of the Gopis in a superconscious state expressed

perforce in sensuous language. It might be interesting to our readers to interpolate here the philosophical meaning which is back of this religion of love.

In the masculine form of Sri Krishna is personified the idea of the Paramatman, the formless Existence, Knowledge, Bliss Absolute—the Purusha, the Male Principle of the universe. Everything with form in the universe, whether gross or subtle, is the Prakriti—Infinite Nature or the Feminine Principle, the Consort of the Purusha—personified as Sri Radha. The attributes (Bhavas) characteristic of this Prakriti or Feminine Principle are nothing but different modes of approach to the Purusha, personified in the Gopis of Vrindaban. Chief among the Gopis is Sri Radha; She it is who is closest to Her Lord, and who becomes merged in Him; so She is the Mahabhava, the Great Bhava, the synthesis of all the other Bhavas, and at the same time the goal of them all. Hence, if one worships Him whole-heartedly, with absolute purity of spirit through any one of the Bhavas, one attains Mahabhava, and through it, the goal—liberation or Bliss Absolute. To make Radha's relationship with Krishna the basis of one's meditation, like her to feel pleasure only in that of Krishna, to the exclusion of all personal motives, is the consummation of all other forms of devotion. The votary of the conjugal relation serves his Beloved like a servant, counsels Him, rejoices and sympathises in His joys and sorrows like a friend, and watches over His mental and physical comforts like a mother—endeavouring to please Him in all respects. The perfect devotee of this type is obviously one who looks only to the comfort of the Beloved, regardless of his own personal pleasure or convenience.

Though jarring to modern ears, this form of discipline has its value to the Vedantist. It is a matter of common experience to him that an idea may become so predominant in the mind as to force out all others and that this peculiarity of the mind may be used in the subjugation of the lower nature and the development of the spiritual one—like using one thorn to take out another. To illustrate: the idea which is the basis of all other ideas in the human being is the conviction of being a body, either male or female. If a man can so inoculate himself with the idea that he is not a man but a woman as to be to all intents and purposes a woman, that idea in turn may be made

to give way to a higher one—that there is neither man nor woman. This is the idea back of the Madhura form of discipline. To the Vedantist, the aspirant who perfects himself in the practice of the conjugal relationship with God is very close to that transcendental state which is the goal of the Advaitist.

The Vaishnavite teachers differ from the Vedantists in that they deny that the ordinary man or woman can attain Mahabhava. Such limitation seems illogical, for, after all, the difference between Radha and her companions as given in the sacred books is not one of kind, but of degree.

We have seen that when Sri Ramakrishna embarked on any course of Sadhana, it was with such one-pointed zeal that everything but the things necessary to the Sadhana of the moment was disregarded. When the desire to practise the Madhura Bhava came to him, he asked and obtained from Mathur a complete outfit of women's clothing. Then began his life as a Gopi of Vrindaban, mad with love for Krishna. His every utterance and movement bespoke the intensity of his feelings, his grief at separation from Krishna and his desire to meet his Beloved. From observation of his actions at this period some idea could be gained of the throes of the Gopis when separated from their Lord. He spent six months in this state, at no time lapsing from the part he had assumed.

The milkmaids of Vrindaban used to worship Katyayani, the presiding Deity, and beg the boon of Sri Krishna as husband. Sri Ramakrishna, too, at this time considered himself the handmaiden of the Divine Mother; but more frequently he served Radha and Krishna in this way.

During this period Sri Ramakrishna lived now and then with the women of Mathur's family in Calcutta. They felt no constraint in his company for they looked upon him as one of themselves. Every year Mathur used to invite him to his house during the Durga Puja festival. The following account of one year will show how remarkably Sri Ramakrishna adapted himself to the ways and manners of women during this period. As usual Mathur made arrangements on a grand scale for the festival. Sri Ramakrishna's presence added a wonderful solemnity to the whole occasion. Mathur and his wife were overjoyed at having this rare opportunity of worshipping the Mother of the universe. The first day's worship was over, and

preparations were made for the evening service. But an unexpected difficulty arose. Sri Ramakrishna, dressed in a silk cloth and looking exactly like a woman, was in one of his moods of absorption as an eternal attendant or companion of the Mother. Mathur's wife could not leave him alone in this trance state, to attend the evening service, for only a few days previously, while he was in such a mood, he had fallen on a pan of fire, burning himself badly. She was in a dilemma when an idea came to her. In haste she brought her valuable ornaments and began to adorn Sri Ramakrishna with them, saying to him all the time, "It is the time for the waving of lights. Won't you come and fan the Mother?" The words had their desired effect upon him. He partially recovered consciousness and in that half-awakened mood joyously accompanied her to the hall of worship. The ceremony began forthwith. Sri Ramakrishna, surrounded by the women, began to fan the goddess with a Chowry. At one end of the hall were the women, while at the other end stood Mathur with the men. Suddenly Mathur caught sight of a very respectable strange woman standing by the side of his wife, waving a Chowry to the Divine Mother. He looked at her again and again, but did not recognize her. He concluded it must be some friend of his wife. When the service was over, and the women were gone, Mathur asked his wife about the stranger. He was agreeably surprised to hear who she was, and said, "Well, it is impossible to recognize Father even in small things, unless he chooses to betray his identity!"

Hriday, too, used to say, "Even his nearest relatives could not pick out Sri Ramakrishna in a group of women. One day Mathur Babu took me into the women's quarters of his home and asked me to point out my uncle. Though I had been living with him for so many years, I did not recognise him at once." He further said, "At Dakshineswar, my uncle used to go to the garden every morning with a flower basket in his hand and collect flowers for offering. We observed that he always advanced his left leg first in the manner of women." The Bhairavi, too, used to say that at the time of his plucking flowers, she often mistook him for Sri Radha.

After praying to the Divine Mother for the boon of realization of Sri Krishna as his Beloved, Sri Ramakrishna devoted all his energies to prayer at the feet of Sri Krishna and Sri

Radha. He longed for the company of Sri Krishna passionately. The pain of separation from his Beloved was unbearable. Day after day, month after month, he spent in fervent expectancy of the vision of Sri Krishna. Nothing could diminish that fervour. He forgot food and drink and spent the whole day in bitter wailing. The eager expectation gradually turned into mad frenzy. The burning sensation all over his body which he had experienced twice before, reappeared. Minute drops of blood began to ooze from pores of his skin. At times the joints of his body seemed to be loosened; owing to the intensity of his anguish, his senses would stop functioning, and he looked like a corpse. The world has seldom seen such intense zeal.

As already said, Sri Radha's love for Sri Krishna was unparalleled even among the wonderfully selfless milkmaids of Vrindaban. So tradition says that it is impossible for one to be blessed with a vision of Sri Krishna unless one first obtains the grace of Sri Radha, whose pure love has for ever enthralled Sri Krishna. Sri Ramakrishna now appreciated the value of this propitiatory worship of Sri Radha and began to pray to her with single-minded devotion. Within a short time, Radha revealed herself to him. This time also he felt the figure vanish into his own body. The Master used to say, "It is impossible to describe the heavenly beauty and sweetness of Radha. Her very appearance showed that she had completely forgotten all personal considerations in her passionate attachment to Krishna. Her complexion was light yellow."

After this vision Sri Ramakrishna began to feel himself to be Radha. It was his constant meditation on her character that obliterated his own personality and transformed him into another Radha. Now was fully manifested in him that supreme passion and attachment which characterized her. He was the very picture of Mahabhava. The Brahmani and the learned devotees like Vaishnav Charan were amazed at this and found it to be identical with the unique state of Radha described in the Puranas, and of Sri Chaitanya, hundreds of years later. The Master referring to this period of his Sadhana said, "The manifestation, in the same individual, of nineteen different kinds of emotion for God is designated in the books on Bhakti as Mahabhava. An ordinary man takes a whole life-time to express even

a single one of these. But in this body (meaning himself) there has been a perfect manifestation of all nineteen."

This complete identification with Sri Radha and meditation with passionate love upon Sri Krishna brought the Master in a short time to the consummation of his practices. Sri Krishna in His exquisitely graceful form revealed Himself to him and fulfilled the hankerings of his soul. Then He merged Himself in the person of Sri Ramakrishna. The Master remained for two or three months in a state of divine felicity. Forgetting his own identity he looked upon himself as Krishna, and he saw Krishna manifested in all creatures—sentient and insentient. Long after, he picked up a blue flower and showing it to his disciples said, "Such was Sri Krishna's complexion as He appeared to me during that practice."

Thus did Sri Ramakrishna reach the culmination of this form of Sadhana.¹ His agony of heart vanished in his glorious realization of the Beloved. He had tapped the fountain of Eternal Bliss and was immersed in it till the time came for a still greater realization—the Advaita. We shall conclude this chapter with the mention of one vision characteristic of this period. One day, he was seated in the verandah of the Vishnu temple listening to the reading of the *Bhagavata*, when he fell into an ecstatic mood and saw the resplendent form of Krishna. Next he found that luminous rays issuing from His lotus feet in the form of a stout rope touched first the *Bhagavata* and then his own chest, connecting for some time all three. The Master used to say, "After this vision, I came to realize that God, His devotee, and the scriptures, which are His words, though they appear to be distinct entities, are in reality one and the same."

¹ For a further consideration of the Madhura Bhava the reader is referred to Swami Vivekananda's lecture on 'Sages of India' in *Lectures from Colombo to Almora*.

NIRVIKALPA SAMADHI

Beyond the realm of thought, transcending the domain of duality, leaving Maya with all her changes and modifications far behind, towering above the delusions of creation, preservation, and destruction, and sweeping away with an avalanche of ineffable Bliss all relative ideas of pain and pleasure, weal and woe, good and evil, shines the glory of the Eternal Brahman, the Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute, in the Nirvikalpa Samadhi. Knowledge, knower, and known dissolve in the menstrium of One Eternal Consciousness; birth, growth, and death vanish in that infinite Existence; and love, lover, and beloved merge in that unbounded ocean of Supreme Felicity. Quelling all doubts and misgivings, stopping the oscillations of mind, exhausting the momentum of past action, breaking down the ridgepoles of that tabernacle in which the soul has made its abode for untold ages—stilling the body, calming the mind, and drowning the ego, comes the sweet joy of Brahman in that superconscious state. Space disappears into nothingness, time is swallowed up in Eternity, causation becomes a dream of the past, and a tremendous effulgence (annihilates) the oppressive darkness of sense and thought. The world with its myriad heavenly bodies melts away; even thought is hushed into silence; and only Existence is. Ah, who can say what the soul feels in its communion with the Self? He only knows that state who has experienced it! It is all stillness indefinable. The soul after a final struggle leaps over the last barrier of relative existence, shatters its prison of matter, and merges in the Infinite Glory of Brahman!

The Nirvikalpa Samadhi is the highest flight of Advaita philosophy. Truth is there revealed in its perfection and glory. The Sadhaka feels it as a tangible thing. His illumination is steady, his bliss constant, and the oblivion of the phenomenal universe is complete. Even when he descends from this dizzy height, he is devoid of the ideas of "I" and "mine" and looks upon the body as a mere shadow, an outer sheath encasing the soul. He does not dwell on the past, takes no thought for the future, and looks with indifference upon the present. Surveying

everything with an eye of equality in this world of infinite variety, the liberated man is no longer touched by phenomena, nor by their reactions of pleasure and pain. He is the same if he—that is to say, his body—is worshipped by the good or tormented by the wicked, for he realizes that it is the one Brahman which is manifesting throughout the whole of Nature. This is the crowning glory of man's spiritual exercises—the last word in his evolution. There is no more birth, no more death, nor any further identification with the changes of the body. He leaves behind all the modifications of 'relativity' like a cast-off garment. He realizes his identity with the Eternal Brahman, the One without a second, and knows that the former idea of himself as mortal, dependent on phenomena, was due to illusion and ignorance. (It is authoritatively stated that for the ordinary Sadhaka there is no return from this exalted state to the normal plane; that after he has enjoyed this supreme bliss for a few days, the dissociation of his soul from the mind and body become complete, and the body dies.) Only those who are born with some special mission in the world can return—in an inscrutable way—from this Samadhi. They live and move in the world for the welfare of mankind. They are invested with supreme spiritual power, and a divine splendour shines through them. They can transmit holiness and purity to others by a touch, a word, a look, or even a thought. This is the reason why such men are able to revolutionize the world.

Samadhi, broadly speaking, is a state of super-consciousness. It is leaving behind the world as perceived by the senses and soaring into supersensuous states which may range from the vision of subtle elements to the merging of the mind in the Absolute. Sri Ramakrishna's Samadhi covered a wide range of experience from his perception of various visions to the 'annihilation' of his mind in the infinite consciousness of Brahman. It had also many forms. Sometimes he willed himself into them, at other times the strong current of his spiritual nature swept him into them in spite of himself. Thus he entered into a "world of power", or "a world of beauty", or "a world of spiritual grandeur," according to the nature of the suggestion from the external world. He would commune with invisible beings—forms of the Divinity or Divine Incarnations of the past. Such visions, however, belong to the domain of Personality, which is

not the last word in spiritual experiences. So long as a Sadhaka is satisfied with this kind of Samadhi, his attainments cannot be said to be complete. He has not yet reached the unfathomable depths of the ocean, though undoubtedly he has gone far beneath the surface, encountering the forms of life abounding there, but he has not yet ransacked the priceless treasures of the deep, which reveal themselves only to those who have the courage to dive on and on till they have touched the bottom. So we find Sri Ramakrishna taking up another course of Sadhana altogether different from his previous ones, and his success in this was as remarkable as the practice was difficult.

Before commencing this new chapter of his life, it is necessary to take a survey of his mind at this time to see how far it answered to the requirements. The scriptures lay down four great qualifications for aspirants in this line. First of all is the discrimination between the Real and the unreal, a firm conviction that Brahman alone is real and all else is unreal. Next is renunciation of the fruits of one's actions here and hereafter. Then comes the following group of attributes—control of the mind and senses, withdrawal from outside objects, forbearance, faith in the teacher and scriptures, and concentration. Lastly comes the yearning for freedom. Only he who is grounded in all these virtues is recommended to approach a teacher who knows the spirit of the Vedas, who is sinless and free from desire, who is compassionate, and above all a knower of Brahman, and, therefore, qualified to set him on the path of higher realization.

Without going into unnecessary detail, we presume that the reader has seen that Sri Ramakrishna, with his whole mind resting on God and totally regardless of the body, was the very embodiment of discrimination. His renunciation was on a par with his discrimination, for the alpha and omega of his life was God; his one prayer to the Divine Mother uttered with the utmost sincerity of heart was to be freed from everything that the world holds dear, in order to attain pure devotion. The following incident narrated by Swami Premananda, a disciple of the Master, though happening much later, will illustrate Sri Ramakrishna's habitual spirit of renunciation.

One night as he was sleeping in the same room with the Master at Dakshineswar, he was awakened to find the Master pacing the floor in a strangely excited state, with his cloth hang-

ing under one arm. At every turn he spat on the floor, remarking in a tone of utter disgust, "Fie ! I spit on it ! I don't want it, take it back, Mother ! Don't tempt me with this trifle." All the time he was unconscious of the outside world, and his countenance glowed with emotion. The young disciple was at a loss to know what the trouble was. After some time Sri Ramakrishna regained the normal state and to the disciple's inquiry replied, "At dead of night I suddenly awoke from sleep, to find Divine Mother approaching me with a basket in Her hand. She held it out to me and asked me to accept the contents, which were mine. At a glance I found that the Mother had brought me wordly honours. They looked so hideous to me that I turned my face in disgust and prayed to Her to take back Her allurements. Thereupon She disappeared with a smile."

We have also ample proof of Sri Ramakrishna's self-control and concentration, his faith as well as his yearning for the Lord. In fact, all these were as the very breath of his nostrils, requiring no effort whatsoever. Not only did he manifest all these rare traits of character, but their intensity was most striking. The field was thus ready ploughed and waited only for the sowing of the seed. At this moment Sri Ramakrishna met the spiritual guide who initiated him into the profundities of the Advaita Vedanta.

There came to the garden of Dakshineswar a wonderful man—wonderful both for his great Advaita realization and for the practical demonstration of it in his life. Totapuri, for that was the name of the august new-comer, was one of those itinerant monks who, realizing Brahman as the only Reality and looking upon the world as a phantom, spend their life under the canopy of heaven, alike in storm and sunshine, maintaining themselves on the slender pittance got from begging. It is said that Totapuri practised Sadhana in a secluded forest on the banks of the sacred Narmada and attained to the Nirvikalpa Samadhi after rigid discipline extending over forty years. A liberated soul, indifferent to the joys and sorrows of the world, he intended to spend the remaining years of his life in making pilgrimages to the holy places. Like a lion he roamed at will over the country. He had been to Puri and Gangasagar, and on the return journey along the course of the Ganga, halted at Dakshineswar. He did not see that the inscrutable Divine Will,

for the fulfilment of a great mission, guided his footsteps to this new place.

Totapuri stopped at the main portico in front of the Kali temple, where Sri Ramakrishna, dressed in an ordinary Dhoti, was seated in an abstracted mood. But his bright face at once arrested the attention of Totapuri, who detected great parts in this plain-looking young man. The longer he looked at Sri Ramakrishna, the more he was impressed and at last said, "You seem to be an advanced seeker after truth. Would you like to learn Vedanta?" "I don't know. It all depends on my Mother. I can agree to your proposal only if She approves of it," was the quiet answer. "All right," said the monk, "go and ask your mother. I shall not be here long." Sri Ramakrishna silently left and went to the Kali temple. He spoke of the matter to the Mother and in a state of trance heard Her command: "Yes, my boy, go and learn of him. It is for this purpose that he has come here." In a state of semi-consciousness and with a beaming countenance, Sri Ramakrishna returned and said to Totapuri that he had his Mother's permission. Totapuri, though struck by the simplicity of the young man, must have smiled at his apparent superstition in addressing the image in the temple as Mother. A great Vedantin, he believed in the Personal God only as the dispenser of fruits of action. Such a God was a mere logical postulate to him, and he did not believe in the efficacy of prayer or devotion to Him on the part of an aspirant for Self-realization. Maya or Shakti—the kinetic state of Brahman, which Sri Ramakrishna looked upon as Mother—was to this Vedantist monk nothing but an illusion, so there was absolutely no need for him to propitiate Her to extricate himself from ignorance. He knew that man was bound by his own ignorance, and that man alone was able to shatter it to pieces through self-effort. But he said nothing to Sri Ramakrishna on the point, thinking that under his training the disciple would soon learn the truth and spontaneously brush aside all superstitions.

Totapuri told Sri Ramakrishna that he must be initiated with proper ceremonies into the sacred order of Sannyasa, before commencing to study the truths of Vedanta or practising the discipline prescribed in this course. He must give up the insignia of his present state of life, such as the sacred thread or the hair tuft, which marked him as a Brahmin and householder, and begin

a new life. Sri Ramakrishna said that he had no objection provided he could do so in private. He made this reservation for the sake of his old mother, who had left Kamarpukur about a year before to spend the remaining years of her afflicted life in the sacred precincts of the Dakshineswar temple, where Mathur's hospitality provided her with a room in full view of the Ganga, and all necessary comforts. It would be too much for her to see her son shave his head and take the monk's vow. Totapuri understood his difficulty and said, "All right, I shall initiate you privately at the proper time."

The auspicious day arrived. Sri Ramakrishna was asked by his Guru to perform the Shraddha ceremony, or the prescribed oblations to his departed forefathers, for a Samnyasin is practically dead to the world and can no longer take part in such rites. Then he was asked to perform his own Shraddha, as he must give up the desire of going to other spheres to enjoy the fruits of his actions. He went through these exactly as he was told, and collecting the requisites for Samnyasa in his meditation room at the Panchavati according to the directions of the Guru, he fasted and joyfully awaited the final consecration. The night was almost spent. In the placid silence of the last half-hour, the most auspicious time for this initiation, the teacher and the disciple entered the meditation room. The Guru chanted the holy Mantras, which the disciple repeated as he put oblations one after another into the sacred fire, renouncing, as he did so, all desire for enjoyment, here and hereafter, and giving assurance of safety, as part and parcel of his own being, to all creatures. After the burning of his hair-tuft and sacred thread, he accepted from the Guru the emblems of a new life, the loin-cloth and the ochre robe.

The day dawned. It was a glorious day for India and indeed for the world, pregnant with immense possibilities for the future. The ancient religion of the Vedanta found a new apostle, and the world saw the appearance of a new man filled with the all-embracing love of a Buddha and endowed with the keen intellect of a Shankara. A new Prophet was born who was to be a bridge between the two worlds, the East and the West, and reconcile the faiths of past with the exigencies of the future.

Prostrating himself before his Guru, Sri Ramakrishna took his seat to receive his instructions. To make him feel constantly

his identity with Brahman, Totapuri began to teach him the cardinal truths of the Advaita Vedanta. "Brahman," he said, "is the only Reality, ever-pure, ever-illuminated, ever-free, beyond the limits of time, space, and causation. Though apparently divided by names and forms through the inscrutable agency of Maya, that enchantress which makes the impossible possible, Brahman^१ is really one and undivided. When a seeker is merged in the beatitude of Samadhi, he does not perceive time and space or name and form—the products of Maya. Whatever is within the domain of Maya is unreal; give it up. Pierce through the maze of name and form and rush out of it like a lion. Dive deep in the search for Self and be firmly established in It through Samadhi. You will then find the world of name and form vanishing into nothing, and this puny ego merging in the cosmic consciousness. You will realize your identity with Brahman, the Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute." Quoting the scriptures he said, "That knowledge is shallow by which one sees or hears or knows another. What is shallow is worthless and can never give supreme felicity. But the knowledge in which one does not see, hear, or know another, which is beyond duality, is great and helps a man to attain the supreme Bliss. How can the mind and senses grasp That which shines in the heart of all as the Eternal Subject?"

Arguing in this way and supporting his arguments by scriptural quotations, Totapuri tried that day to help Sri Ramakrishna to fix his mind firmly in the Absolute. We describe it in Sri Ramakrishna's own words: "After the initiation, 'the naked one'^१ began to teach me the various conclusions of the Advaita Vedanta and asked me to withdraw the mind completely from all objects and dive into the Atman. But in spite of all my attempts I could not cross the realm of name and form and bring my mind to the unconditioned state. I had no difficulty in withdrawing the mind from all other objects except one, the all too familiar form of the Blissful Mother—radiant and of the essence of Pure Consciousness—which appeared before me as a living reality preventing me from passing beyond the realm of name and form. Again and again I tried to con-

^१ This was the appellation which Sri Ramakrishna, out of respect, invariably used for his Guru, who being a Naga Sannyasin generally went naked.

concentrate my mind upon the Advaita teachings, but every time the Mother's form stood in my way. In despair I said to 'the naked one', 'It is hopeless, I cannot raise my mind to the unconditioned state and come face to face with the Atman.' He grew excited and sharply said, 'What ! You can't do it ! But you have to.' He cast his eyes around, and finding a piece of glass he took it up and pressing the point between my eyebrows said, 'Concentrate the mind on this point !' Then with a stern determination I again sat to meditate, and as soon as the gracious form of the Divine Mother appeared before me, I used my discrimination as a sword and with it severed it in two. There remained no more obstruction to my mind, which at once soared beyond the relative plane, and I lost myself in Samadhi!"

Sri Ramakrishna passed into the ineffable glory of the Nirvikalpa Samadhi. In that rapturous ecstasy the senses and mind stopped their functions. The body became motionless as a corpse. The universe rolled away from his vision—even space itself melted away. Everything was reduced to ideas, which floated like shadows in the dim background of the mind. Only the faint consciousness of "I" repeated itself in dull monotony. Presently that too stopped, and what remained was Existence alone. The soul lost itself in the Self, and all idea of duality, of subject and object, was effaced. Limitations were gone, and finite space was one with infinite space. Beyond speech, beyond experience, and beyond thought, Sri Ramakrishna had realized the Brahman—had become the Brahman.

Totapuri sat for a long time, silently watching his disciple. Finding him perfectly motionless, he stole out of the room and locked the door lest anybody should intrude without his knowledge. Then he awaited the call from Sri Ramakrishna to open the door. The day passed on, the night came. Another day and still another—three days passed and there was no call. Totapuri was astonished and went to see what was wrong. He opened the door and entered the room. There sat Sri Ramakrishna in the very same position in which he had left him. There was no manifestation of life in the body, but the countenance was calm, serene, and radiant. He saw that the disciple was still dead to the objective world, his mind absorbed in the Self, without a flicker—absolutely steady !

With breathless wonder, Totapuri stood before this august

spectacle. "Is it really true?" he said to himself. "Is it possible that this man has attained in the course of a single day that which it took me forty years of strenuous practice to achieve?" Impelled by doubt, he again made a searching examination. With the utmost care he determined if the heart was beating, or if there was the slightest trace of respiration. Again and again he touched the disciple's corpselike body. There was no sign either of life or of consciousness. In joyous bewilderment he cried out, "Great God, it is nothing short of a miracle!" It was undoubtedly a case of the Nirvikalpa Samadhi—the culmination of the Advaita practice!

Totapuri immediately took steps to bring the mind of Sri Ramakrishna down to the world of phenomena. The little room in the Panchavati rang with the holy Mantra—Hari Om—uttered in a solemn voice. Little by little Sri Ramakrishna came to the consciousness of the outside universe. He opened his eyes and saw his Guru looking at him with tenderness and admiration. The Guru answered the worthy disciple's prostration by locking him in a warm embrace.

Totapuri usually did not stay at any one place for more than three days. But he wished to establish this wonderful new disciple, firmly on the lofty plane of Advaita, and he remained eleven months in the garden of Dakshineswar. We shall now describe some interesting events of this period which will throw a flood of light on the unique relation of Sri Ramakrishna with this great monk and the Bhairavi Brahmani, and show how in certain respects the disciple in his turn became the teacher of his Gurus.

RELATION WITH HIS GURUS

The reader is already aware that Sri Ramakrishna leaned more upon the prompting of his own pure mind for spiritual instruction than upon any outside help. A great scholar writing on this point has said, "Ramakrishna, having attained by his own internal effort the central illumination, accepted several teachers in the different paths of Yoga, but always showed in the manner and the swiftness of his realization that this acceptance was a concession to the general rule by which effective knowledge must be received as by a disciple from a Guru." Those who have followed the course of events described in the foregoing pages cannot fail to appreciate the truth of the above remark. As a matter of fact, though the Master undoubtedly received a certain amount of guidance from these teachers and followed it implicitly, yet he always exercised a great influence on their minds and illuminated the dark and obscure corners of their hearts. Though a disciple, Sri Ramakrishna sometimes became their teacher ; widening their spiritual outlook or giving a wonderful depth to their visions. And his Gurus bowed before him, acknowledging the truth of his wisdom.

Now a few words about Totapuri. He was probably a Punjabi by birth and had renounced the world while quite young. He was initiated by a Yogi who was the head of a monastery of the Naga sect at Ludhiana in the Punjab. The members of this sect are renowned for their austerity and power of endurance. After the passing away of his Guru, Totapuri took his place. He was a tall man with a robust constitution, and always led an outdoor life. Though a man of realization, he used to spend a great part of his time in meditation. Like other members of his sect, he attached great holiness to fire, and wherever he might be, kept a lighted fire by him. In the still hours of the night when everybody was asleep Totapuri brightened his fire and taking his seat by it sank into deep meditation. A great part of the day also was spent in meditation. But few knew of it, as he used to lie near the fire, his body covered with a sheet, apparently asleep.

Totapuri possessed only a water-pot, a pair of tongs, a skin

for his seat, and the sheet in which his body was wrapped. He used to clean his water-pot every day. Observing his regular habit of meditation Sri Ramakrishna one day said to him, "You have attained the highest knowledge. Why then are you so particular about meditation?" Pointing to his water-pot, Totapuri answered calmly, "See, how it glitters! Will it not lose its lustre if I do not rub it daily? It is the same with the mind. Unless one brightens it daily with meditation, it becomes unclean." The Master, while acknowledging the truth of the remark, said in turn, "But if it is made of gold? Then it won't require daily rubbing and scrubbing." "Yes, that is true," the teacher admitted with a smile. Sri Ramakrishna remembered these words of his Guru about the utility of regular meditation, and later on, when with his disciples and followers, often referred to them. Who knows if Totapuri remembered the retort of his disciple, whose character was like pure gold?

Totapuri seems to have studied the Vedanta and to have received spiritual instructions from his Guru at an early age. In their monastery there was an excellent arrangement for training the monks for meditation. Sri Ramakrishna would tell his disciples what he had heard from Totapuri on this subject: "There were seven hundred monks in their Math. Those who were beginners were taught to meditate sitting on thick cushions, for a hard seat would be uncomfortable for them and draw their minds from God to the body. As they progressed in meditation, they were given less and less comfortable seats, and finally only a skin or even the bare ground sufficed for the purpose. In food and other matters also the same graduation was observed. In dress, for instance, they were trained by degrees to go without clothes. Well, man is by his very birth fettered with the eightfold tie of shame, hatred, fear, caste, pedigree, honour and the rest; so these monks were taught to get rid of them little by little. After they were well grounded in meditation, they were asked to roam from one holy place to another, first in the company of other Sadhus, and subsequently alone. Such was the method of training among the Nagas." About the election of the Mahanta or the head of the Math, Sri Ramakrishna gave the following account as heard from his Guru:

"Whenever there was a vacancy they used to elect for the office one from among themselves whom they found to be a real

Paramahansa. Otherwise there was danger of going astray in handling wealth or in being the recipient of honours. So the one whom they found to be really above the temptation of money, was raised to this position. Such a man would spend the funds at his disposal in the service of God and the monastic members of the Order."

Totapuri was born with many good Samskaras.¹ He was possessed of a mind which was sincere, and he had implicit faith in the Guru. Not only was he blessed with the desire for freedom and the company of a sage, but he also utilised them fully, with the result that he gradually attained to the Nirvikalpa Samadhi. He does not seem to have ever suffered from the vagaries of a wayward mind, as is the case with ordinary men, but with faith in his own powers, advanced speedily towards the goal under the directions of his Guru. He believed in self-effort and self-reliance as the determining factors of a man's life. He could not realize the helpless state of a man who, unable to fight the vicious tendencies of his mind, gives way to them in despair. Nor did he believe in a higher power governing the destinies of mankind, without whose co-operation life becomes a Sisyphean task. His own experience gave him no inkling of this dark side of nature. Everything was for him smooth and plain sailing. All through life he carried to completion whatever he was determined to do, without invoking any outside aid. Naturally he laughed at the thought that the senses could lead a man astray and subject him to endless torment. He was supremely ignorant of the terrible power of Maya, the eternal and inseparable companion of Brahman, manipulating the universe exactly as She pleases. This lack in his experience was removed by coming in contact with Sri Ramakrishna, from whom he learnt that Maya can never be ignored—that Maya and Brahman are really one. Before he left Dakshineswar he had to bow in reverence before this inscrutable power of the Lord and acknowledge its existence.

A monist from youth, Totapuri could not appreciate the value of devotion as a means of spiritual progress, nor could he understand that it is a great help to concentration, making the devotee gradually forgo all personal and selfish considerations

¹ Impressions of past lives from the Oriental standpoint, or latent impressions in the subconscious mind, according to the Occidental idea.

for the sake of the Beloved. He did not believe that true love could help a man realize God and lead him to Advaita. Prayer, song, repetition of the Lord's name and the other auxiliaries of the path of devotion seemed to him quite meaningless. He even ridiculed the devotees's display of emotion. But he was not an atheist or a man devoid of attachment to God. Devotional songs by Sri Ramakrishna would bring tears to his eyes, though he did not understand their meaning. He liked the placid form of devotion known as the Shanta, but had no idea that God can be approached as master, friend, son or beloved, and that by worshipping Him in all these various ways a devotee can realize Him quickly. The yearning and importunity of a Bhakta, his sense of pride, the pangs of separation, the weeping, laughing, dancing and other expressions of his sentiments towards the Ishta, seemed to Totapuri to be nothing short of madness. He did not believe that by such processes a Bhakta could attain his goal. This often formed a lively topic of discussion between Totapuri and his gifted disciple.

From his youth Sri Ramakrishna used to utter at day-break and at dusk the various names of God accompanied by the clapping of hands and sometimes ecstatic dancing. He would repeat aloud for some time, "Hari bol, Hari bol!"—"Hari is the Guru, and the Guru is Hari!"—"O Govinda, my life!"—"The mind is Krishna, the Prana is Krishna, knowledge is Krishna, meditation is Krishna, perception is Krishna, intellect is Krishna!"—"Thou art the universe, and the universe is in Thee!"—"I am the instrument and Thou art the operator!"—and so on. Even after his highest realization he adhered to this practice. One day when the shadows were falling and he was engaged in a spiritual talk with Totapuri, Sri Ramakrishna began his usual chant of the Lord's names, at the same time clapping his hands. Totapuri was astonished to see a liberated soul¹ like Sri Ramakrishna resorting to practices meant only for beginners. With a derisive smile he addressed the Master, "What! Are you preparing bread in that way?" Sri Ramakrishna laughed and said, "Nonsense! I am taking the name of God, and you compare it to the making of bread! Shame!"

¹ The allusion is to the practice among the up-country people of flattening small lumps of dough into thin cakes by patting them between the palms.

Totapuri smiled at the reply, and thinking that there must be some meaning behind this act, did not protest further.

Another evening Sri Ramakrishna was seated with his Guru near his sacred fire. Both were absorbed in Vedantic discussion, when a servant belonging to the garden approached the fire to take a coal to light his hookah. Totapuri did not notice him at first, but when he saw the intruder he flew into a rage and began to abuse him for his sacrilegious act, even threatening to strike him with his tongs. "What a shame!" ejaculated Sri Ramakrishna again and again in a half-conscious mood, and rocking with laughter. "What makes you laugh? Was not the man exceedingly impertinent?" —interrupted Totapuri, rather astonished at the strange conduct of his disciple. Sri Ramakrishna replied with a smile, "Yes, but I was marking also the depth of your illumination! You were just now telling me that Brahman alone is real, and everything in the universe is Its manifestation. But the next moment you forget all and are about to beat a man! I laugh to see the irresistible power of Maya!" Totapuri became grave at these words. After a few minutes' silence he said, "Yes, you are right. I forget everything in a fit of anger. Passion is indeed a dangerous enemy. I shall never give way to anger again." And he kept his word.

Talking of the inscrutable nature of Maya, Sri Ramakrishna used to say, "Even Brahma feels miserable when he falls into the snare. You close your eyes and discriminate, 'There is no thorn, nothing to prick,' but as soon as your hand is hurt by a thorn, you cry out in pain. Similarly you may reason in your mind that there is no such thing as birth or death, virtue or vice, pain or misery, hunger or thirst—that you are the Eternal Brahman, the Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute; but the moment there is some trouble with the body, or temptations overcome the mind, you forget all your high philosophy and are overwhelmed with delusion and its painful consequences." He used to illustrate this by the following parable: "Rama, Sita and Lakshmana are going through the woods. It is a narrow path where only one at a time can go. Rama is leading the way, bow and arrow in hand; Sita is following him; while Lakshmana is bringing up the rear with his bow and arrow. Lakshmana is intensely devoted to Rama and longs to see him constantly. But Sita is between and obstructing his view, and he is sore at heart.

Sita is quick in detecting this, and moved with sympathy, she steps aside now and then saying, 'Look !' Then Lakshmana sees his beloved Lord. Similarly, between the Jiva and the Lord there is Maya—the Divine Mother. Unless She, moved by sympathy, steps aside, the Jiva can never see his Lord. So, however much you may discriminate, it is all to no purpose without Her help."

Totapuri did not understand this magic power of the Divine Mother, which for some forges endless chains, but for the fortunate few opens the gate of heaven. He himself had ever been an object of special favour with the Divine Mother. Through Her grace he was possessed of those qualities of head and heart which lifted him above the tribulations of life. Totapuri was not conscious of this. He could not realize that Her gracious hand was protecting him from all dangers and trials, and naturally he thought that he had acquired the highest knowledge by his own personal efforts. But the Divine Mother willed that he should know his real position, and provided an opportunity to show him this.

Endowed with an iron constitution, Totapuri was never troubled with complaints of the body. He had a good digestion and always enjoyed sound sleep. His mind, too, was full of bliss—the outcome of his realization. But after a few months' stay in Bengal even his strong physique felt the enervating influence of the climate, and he became a victim to a virulent attack of dysentery. Day and night he felt an unbearable griping pain, which disturbed the concentration and the balance of his trained mind. From its absorption in Brahman it began to be diverted to the troubles of the body. Even before the attack he had felt that the climate was not suitable for him, and that he must move. But he could not persuade himself to forgo the blissful company of Sri Ramakrishna simply because of the body. The very idea was ridiculous, and besides the body could contract disease anywhere. And why should he care at all for this physical frame, the very nature of which was to suffer, decay, and ultimately die ? Had he not realized once for all that he was the Soul and not the body ? So why should he be afraid of death ? With such arguments he silenced his mind and stayed on at Dakshineswar.

But as the symptoms of disease increased and the desire to quit Dakshineswar became stronger, something or other pre-

vented him from bringing the subject up to Sri Ramakrishna and asking his permission to leave. Seeing that he was losing weight Sri Ramakrishna arranged a proper diet and medicines for him, but it was of no use. Then at his instance Mathur arranged for a regular treatment, but with no better result. In spite of all his trouble with the body, the Swami's mind was still disciplined enough to enter into Samadhi at will and forget all about the physical pain.

But on a particular night his pain became excruciating and he could get no relief. Then he tried to dissociate the mind from the body by concentrating it on Brahman. But before he could raise it to that level, it slipped back to the pain in the body. He tried again and again, but failed every time. Then he became disgusted with his body and thought, "Because of this wretched body, my mind is beyond control today. I know positively that I am not the body. So why should I associate myself with it and suffer its pain? What's the use of dragging it about? I shall sacrifice it in the Ganga and put an end to all my trouble." Thus determined, Totapuri carefully concentrated his mind on Brahman and slowly advanced into the water. But what was this! Was the Ganga really dry to-night? Or was it an illusion of his mind? He went on and on until he almost reached the other bank—yet the water was not deep enough to drown him! He caught a glimpse of the trees and houses on the bank, standing like shadows in the midst of darkness. Bewildered he thought, "What a freak of Maya! There is not water enough in the river today to drown me! What a mysterious play of Lord!" Suddenly a veil was lifted, as it were, from his mind's eye. A glorious vista of Divine Presence was unfolded before him. His intellect was dazzled before the flash of this revelation. On all sides he found the manifestation of the Divine Mother—the Omnipotent Mother of the universe! She was in the water, and She was on land. She was the body, and She was the mind. She was pain, and She was comfort. She was knowledge, and She was ignorance. She was life, and She was death. He found the Mother in everything that he saw, or heard, or thought, or imagined. She was turning Yea into Nay, and vice versa. No embodied being could go beyond Her jurisdiction unless She was pleased to let him go. He had not even the freedom to die! Again, beyond the body and mind

also, it was She—the Mother, in Her Transcendent, Her Absolute aspect ! She was the Brahman whom he had been worshipping all his life, and to whom he had been offering his heart's adoration ! Brahman and Shakti were one and the same thing—the two aspects of the same Entity.

In that hour of solemn silence, Totapuri, with a heart full of devotion, realized the Immanence of the Mother in the universe and again and again, took Her holy name. With a loving heart he surrendered himself completely at Her feet and waded back to Dakshineswar. Though there was still pain in the body, it was not reflected in his mind. The joyous memory of the Revelation sent a thrill through his whole being. He took his accustomed seat by the fire and spent the remainder of the night in uttering the name of Divine Mother and in meditating on Her.

Next morning, when Sri Ramakrishna came to inquire about the Swami's health, he found him altogether a different man. His face was beaming with joy, and the body seemed to be free from illness. He asked Sri Ramakrishna to sit by him, so that he might tell what had happened during the night. He said, "The disease has been a friend to me. Last night I was blessed with the vision of the Divine Mother and through Her grace have been freed from the disease. Oh, how profoundly ignorant I was ! Well, now get me your Mother's permission to leave. I now understand that it was to teach me this lesson that She kept me here so long. Many a time did I think of leaving and actually went to you to bid you good-bye. But somebody always prevented me, as it were, whenever I tried to speak of it to you, and diverted me by introducing other topics !" Sri Ramakrishna smiled at this and said, "Ah, then you refused to believe in my Mother, and argued with me to disprove Her ! Now you see that She is real. She taught me long ago that Brahman and Shakti are inseparable—like fire and its burning property."

The music from the concert-room was pouring forth its charming strains when the two saints left their seats to go to the temple of the Divine Mother. Both felt as they prostrated themselves before the Mother that She gave Her willing assent to the departure. A few days after, Totapuri took leave of Sri Ramakrishna and bade adieu to Dakshineswar.

The lesson which Totapuri learnt at Dakshineswar may be

summed up in Sri Ramakrishna's words: "when the Supreme Being is thought of as inactive—not creating, sustaining, or destroying—I call Him Brahman or Purusha, the Impersonal God. When I think of Him as active—creating, sustaining, and destroying—I call him Shakti or Maya or Prakriti or the Personal God. But really the distinction between Brahman and Shakti—or Impersonal God and Personal God—is a distinction without a difference. The Impersonal and the Personal are one and the same Being even as milk and its whiteness. You cannot conceive the milk without the whiteness. They are one like a gem and its lustre. They are one like a snake and its zigzag movement. When you think of a snake, you automatically think of its zigzag motion also. Similar is the relation between Brahman and the Divine Mother."

The Bhairavi Brahmani, Sri Ramakrishna's guide in the Tantrika mode of worship, was present at Dakshineswar when the Master was initiated into Samnyasa. A devotee and follower of the dualistic form of worship, she could not appreciate the Advaita philosophy and its non-dualistic ideas, nor did she like the close intimacy of Sri Ramakrishna with Totapuri and even said to him, "Don't be so intimate with that monk. His method is dry intellectualism. You will lose your devotion and love for God if you associate with him." Needless to say that the Master paid no heed to these words and pursued his own course.

After Totapuri left Dakshineswar, the Master was determined to remain in a state of absolute identity with Brahman far above all subjective and objective experiences. He directed his activities accordingly. Words cannot describe the state of his mind at this period. He was not conscious of his body and its requirements. In that state he lost all consciousness of "I and mine" or "thou and thine"—in fact, the very distinction between subject and object. There was neither one nor many—both were engulfed in the crowning realization of the Absolute. He passed beyond the realm of ^{body and senses} relativity. To him there was neither bondage nor striving for freedom. He lived and moved and had his being in the glory of the ultimate truth. The urgings of the mind and senses were completely at rest. He remained in a state of Peace and Bliss—unspeakable, ineffable—a condition of supreme ecstasy in which there was no personality, and divinity alone remained. It was an Infinite Stillness in which

Self communed with Self. Sri Ramakrishna had reached the highest pinnacle of spiritual realization, and all this without the least effort, for his pure mind was now habituated to dissociating itself from all finite things, which throw a veil, as it were, over the absolute majesty of Brahman—the One without a second. In that state he remained for six months. Referring to this period of his life the Master used to say, "For six months at a stretch I remained in that state whence ordinary men can never return—the body falling off after three weeks like a sere leaf. I was not conscious of day and night. Flies would enter my mouth and nostrils just as they do in a dead body ; but I did not feel them. The hair became matted with accretions of dust. There was no chance for the body to survive, and it would certainly have perished but for the kind ministrations of a monk who was present at Dakshineswar at the time. He realized the state of my mind and also understood that this body must be kept alive at any cost, as it was meant to be of immense good to the world. He, therefore, busily engaged himself in preserving this body. He would bring food regularly to me and try to bring my mind in various ways down to the consciousness of the relative world, even by beating me with a stick. As soon as he found me to be a little conscious, he would press some food into my mouth, only a bit of which reached the stomach ; and there were days in which all his efforts would be in vain. Six months passed in this way. At last I received the Mother's command, 'Remain on the threshold of relative consciousness for the sake of humanity.' Then I was laid up with a terrible attack of dysentery. An excruciating pain in the stomach tortured me day and night. It went on for six months. Thus only did the mind gradually come down to a lower level and the consciousness of the body. I became a normal man. But before that at the slightest opportunity the mind would take a transcendental flight and merge in the Nirvikalpa Samadhi !"

About this time an incident happened in the family of Mathur which further strengthened his faith in Sri Ramakrishna. Jagadamba Dasi, Mathur's wife, contracted dysentery and the physicians declared her case to be hopeless. Mathur was greatly upset by his impending calamity. He hastened to Dakshineswar to seek the Master's counsel and aid. Sri Ramakrishna made him sit by his side and tenderly inquired into the cause of his grief.

Mathur said with a sob, "Not only am I threatened with a terrible personal loss, but if the management of the estate passes into other hands, I shall be unable to continue my services to you." Sri Ramakrishna was touched to the quick at his sore plight and said in an ecstatic mood, "Don't be afraid, your wife will recover." These words reassured Mathur, and he returned home. To his great relief he found that the disease had suddenly taken a turn for the better, and the crisis was past. Referring to this incident, Sri Ramakrishna afterwards said, "From that day Jagadamba slowly advanced towards recovery, and the disease was transferred to this body (meaning himself). As a result of this cure I suffered for six months from dysentery and other complaints." Then he would add, "Was it for nothing that Mathur served me so faithfully for fourteen years? He could do so only because the Mother had shown him various miracles through this body."

Because of this and, perhaps, also on account of his supreme disregard of the body during his six months' absorption in the Nirvikalpa Samadhi, he fell a victim to dysentery. Mathur engaged Kaviraj Ganga Prasad Sen for his treatment. Hriday was in constant attendance upon him. But in spite of the disease his mind was always full of peace and bliss. At the slightest suggestion it would forget the body and everything about the world and reach a transcendental plane where only the Atma remained. So he must have felt very little of his physical pain which, however, often dragged him to the sense plane. Dakshineswar had at this time an influx of various Vedantist monks, with whom he used to discuss the highest philosophy. Needless to say, it would have been impossible for him to take part in these discussions, had he been overwhelmed by the disease like an ordinary person.

After six months, Sri Ramakrishna gradually recovered. His mind acquired the power to accommodate itself to the plan of relativity as well as to that of transcendentalism. As a result of the Advaita realization it had acquired a wonderful breadth accepting all forms of religion as so many ways of reaching perfection. An instance of this catholicity we find in his practice of the Mohammedan faith soon after his recovery from dysentery. A man named Govinda Rai, who was originally Kshatriya, but who, being attracted by the spirit of universality

brotherhood obtaining in Islam, had embraced this faith, came to Dakshineswar at this time. He was a lover of God and probably followed the practices of the Sufi sect.¹ Rani Rasmani's charity had provided a place for all, and Govinda found a congenial atmosphere in the garden of Dakshineswar, where he took up his residence. His devotion soon attracted the notice of Sri Ramakrishna, who was charmed with his great faith and love for God. Gradually it came to him that, since Mohammedanism was also a means to the realization of God, he would see how the Lord blessed the devotees who worshipped that way. He made up his mind to be initiated by Govinda.

Once the idea became fixed in his mind, there was no delay in its fulfilment. He intimated his desire to Govinda, who was glad to initiate him. To the practice of this new religion the Master applied himself with his characteristic thoroughness. Thus did he describe his mentality at this period: "Then I used to repeat the name of Allah, wear my cloth in the fashion of the Mohammedans and recite the Namaz regularly. All Hindu ideas being wholly banished from the mind, not only did I not salute the Hindu gods, but I had no inclination even to visit them. After three days I realized the goal of that form of devotion." First of all he saw a radiant Person with a long beard and of grave appearance; and then his mind, passing through the realization of the Brahman with attributes, was finally absorbed in the Brahman without attributes.

Hriday used to say that during this practice Sri Ramakrishna was willing to eat Mohammedan food, and it was only at the earnest entreaty of Mathur that he desisted from it. Knowing that Sri Ramakrishna, with his childlike tenacity of purpose, would not be satisfied unless he could carry out some part at least of the desire, Mathur had various dishes prepared in the Mohammedan style by a Brahmin under the direction of a Mussulman, and gave them to the Master to take. During the practice of Islam he never stepped into the precincts of the temple, and lived in Mathur's quarters which were outside the temple compound.

Sri Ramakrishna's realization in the Mohammedan form of practice appears to be fraught with far-reaching consequences for India. That he practised it after attaining perfection in the

¹ A Mohammedan sect deeply influenced by the Vedanta.

Advaita¹ makes it clear that only through this, the underlying basis of all faiths, can the Hindus and Mohammedans be united with each other. The Master was aware of the wide differences in views and temperament between these two rival faiths, but may we not infer from his successful practice of Mohammedanism that the existing barriers will one day be obliterated, and the two races clasp each other in amity and love? Time alone will prove the truth of our surmise.

Sri Ramakrishna was still very weak after the attack of dysentery, and it was thought that a change to his native village would be beneficial. Mathur and his wife supplied the necessary funds for the trip and undertook to see that the Master would be taken care of during his stay there. About the month of May in the year 1867 Sri Ramakrishna started for Kamarpukur, accompanied by Hriday and the Bhairavi Brahmani. His mother preferred not to leave the bank of the Ganga and remained at Dakshineswar under the care of Mathur.

It was eight years since Sri Ramakrishna had been in Kamarpukur. His relatives and friends were eagerly expecting him. They had heard all sorts of rumours about his strange behaviour—that sometimes he dressed himself as a woman and called out the name of Hari; at others he led a Sannyasin's life; and at still other times was a Mussulman repeating the name of Allah! All this made these simple village people anxious about his mental condition. But great was their relief when Sri Ramakrishna appeared in their midst. He was the same old Gadadhar—with his boyish frankness, his genial good humour, his extreme truthfulness, his whole-souled devotion that made him lose consciousness of the body in the name of God—all intact! Nay, there was something more. There was an extraordinary spiritual atmosphere about the young man which prevented too free approach, or discussion of worldly topics with him unless he chose. At the same time his very presence was enough to drive away all their mental troubles and discomforts, and bring to them joy and peace. Some strange influence attracted them to his side in large numbers to enjoy his saintly company. The house of Rameshwar was thronged with eager visitors of both sexes from early morning to late at night.

¹ The philosophy that teaches: Truth is one; sages call it by various names. (*Ekam Sat Vimaśat*)

The Master stayed at Kamarpukur for six or seven months. It was a great relaxation for him to enter into the joys and sorrows of the simple village-folk, after the stormy Sadhana at Dakshineswar. It became his endeavour to awaken these old friends, slowly and silently, to the real object of this life, and to teach them, in the midst of their daily occupations, the lessons of self-control and surrender to the will of God.

Among these he was surprised to find some really advanced souls who appreciated the depth of his spiritual realizations. The Master narrated the following incident. One day, after dinner, he was seated in his room, when some women of the village came to visit him. In the course of the religious talk that followed, he fell into a trance. As this was by no means an uncommon occurrence in his life, the visitors continued the conversation. Finally one of them asked her friends to keep quiet saying, "He is now swimming like a fish in the ocean of Brahman. Please don't disturb him in his enjoyment." Though not believing her, they became silent. On the Master's return to consciousness they asked him about it, and he said, "Yes, she was quite right. But I wonder how she could know about it." Those artless village-folk had a sincere affection for Sri Ramakrishna. Many of the women brought sweets for him. Those who were busy at home passed their leisure moments in his company.

Sarada Devi, his girl wife, was then staying with her father at Jayrambati. The last time she saw Sri Ramakrishna was when she was seven years old, and too young to understand her position. The only thing she remembered in connection with her husband's visit to Jayrambati was that his nephew Hriday had sought her out and made an offering of lotuses at her feet. Shortly after Sri Ramakrishna's arrival, she was sent for. The Master learnt of it, but expressed no opinion. A girl of fourteen, Sarada Devi, or the Holy Mother, as she became known later to the devotees of Sri Ramakrishna, arrived at Kamarpukur. Strictly speaking, this was her first meeting with her divine husband.

After a few days' stay, she understood his mental condition and was eager to serve him with all her love and devotion. She dedicated herself to him heart and soul, and looked to him for guidance and illumination, to which, as his wife and devoted

pupil, she had foremost claim. Of a pure and spotless heart, she rejoiced that she was bound to this God-man by an indissoluble tie. The Master willingly shouldered his new responsibility and began to train her. He remembered his Guru's words on finding that he was a married man: "What does it matter? He alone is firmly established in the knowledge of Brahman, who can keep intact his renunciation and discrimination even while living with his wife. He alone has attained the supreme illumination who can look upon man and woman alike as Atman and deal with them accordingly. A man with an idea of the distinction of sex may be a good Sadhaka, but he is still far from his goal." Here was a chance for Sri Ramakrishna to test his realizations. By allowing his wife the rightful privileges of her position, he subjected himself to an ordeal from which he emerged brighter than ever.

It was a characteristic of Sri Ramakrishna that once he thought it his duty to do a thing, he could not procrastinate or leave it half-finished. The training of his wife in secular as well as spiritual matters was whole-hearted. He took special care that she had an all-round training in the discharge of her household duties, in making good use of money, and above all, in behaving according to circumstances relying solely upon God. How far this teaching, by precept and example, was successful, we shall come to know. Suffice it to say that the Holy Mother was charmed with the ideal of pure and selfless love that was shown to her by her saintly husband; she was content to worship him as her Ishtadeva and by following in his footsteps to develop her own character.

The Bhairavi Brahmani lived on intimate terms with the family of Rameshwar and was respected by everybody. Though she was highly advanced spiritually, she had not yet attained perfection. This was the reason she tried to dissuade the Master from practising the Advaita under the guidance of Totapuri. She had not reached the state of a Divya Sadhika, which is the highest grade among the Tantrika worshippers, nor was she above such petty feelings as anger or jealousy. She could not bear to see Sri Ramakrishna associate with any other devotee or teacher. It was rather strange that a devotee of the Brahmani's stamp should have such traits. She knew that Sri Ramakrishna's love and respect were not subject to the ebb and

flow of the ordinary man's—they were abiding. But she did not understand that a love which fails to give liberty is selfish. True love not only has a permanent hold on the beloved's heart, but strikes off the fetters from the feet of lover and beloved as well and even brings about the realization of God !

By degrees the Brahmani yielded to a sense of false pride. As the spiritual teacher of Sri Ramakrishna, she came to consider herself a supremely important personage whom everybody must obey or be accursed. She did not take kindly to the idea of Sri Ramakrishna's doing his duty to his wife. Perhaps she feared this would endanger his celibate life. But the Master would not listen to her remonstrances. This not only mortified her, but inflamed her egoism, in consequence of which she disregarded him for some time. If any one, after discussing a spiritual topic in her presence, wished to refer to Sri Ramakrishna, she would declare in a passion, "Why should you speak to him on the matter ? Wasn't it I who opened his eyes ?" She grew very peevish, and with or without provocation rebuked the ladies of the house. Sri Ramakrishna remained unruffled and revered her as much as ever. Under his instructions the Holy Mother looked upon her as her own mother-in-law, served her with great love and respect, and meekly submitted to her in everything.

Excessive pride clouds our vision and makes us commit mistakes at every step. The Brahmani, despite her attainments, could not control herself. One day she picked a quarrel with Hriday over nothing, and the matter could only be settled through the intervention of some of the Master's relatives. The Brahmani at first was greatly humiliated, but on reflection she perceived her mistakes and hung her head in shame. She saw not only that it was inadvisable to remain longer in this family, but that her attachment to the Master was a golden chain which she must snap. In her changed attitude towards him she realized that she alone was to blame, and her remorse was keen. A few days after this, she approached Sri Ramakrishna with sandal-paste and garlands of flowers which she had taken great pains to prepare, and with these adorned him as an Incarnation of Sri Gauranga. She implored his forgiveness and bade farewell to Kamarpukur. She had lived six years with Sri Ramakrishna. The lesson she derived from her contact with him was not to

be forgotten. Through it she attained a higher plane, and her remaining days were spent in a more vigorous search for truth.

While in Kamarpukur, Sri Ramakrishna now and then paid visits to Sihore, the native place of Hriday. Hriday invited well-known Vaishnava devotees to meet and hold religious discourses with the Master. His mother Hemangini Devi, revered Sri Ramakrishna as her Chosen Deity and regularly worshipped his feet with flowers. One day she prayed for the boon of dying in the sacred city of Banaras. The Master in a state of exaltation granted it, and she actually died in Banaras, retaining her consciousness to the last.

After a stay at Kamarpukur Sri Ramakrishna regained his former health and returned with Hriday to Dakshineswar. Near Burdwan, where he was to take the train, he saw in a rice field a species of tiny plants, the flowers and leaves of which are said to be very pleasing to the Lord Shiva. He was at once seized with a desire to worship the Lord with them and, though it was not particularly clean, he sat on the ground to meditate, putting some of the leaves and flowers on his head. He soon was plunged into a deep trance, with no thought of the journey. Finding the train-time near and the Master in that helpless condition, Hriday ministered to him and taking him up in his arms reached the station just in time to catch the train. The Master used to say that a Sadhaka can realize God only when he is above the distinction between cleanliness and uncleanness. In this instance he demonstrated this precept.

GLIMPSES OF MATHUR

'O Hriday, my wife, children, wealth, position, and everything is unreal, and Ramakrishna alone is real'. In these terms Mathur expressed his deep veneration for his great Master. We have seen how he gradually surrendered himself to Sri Ramakrishna and looked to him for guidance. We know of one of the Master's visits to his Jaun Bazar house on the occasion of the Durga Puja. We shall narrate some interesting events that took place on another such occasion. As usual, Mathur heartily enjoyed the three days of the Puja in the company of Sri Ramakrishna. When the Vijaya Dashami or the day for immersion of the image in the Ganga arrived everybody was sad at heart at the thought of the impending separation from the Mother. But Mathur was still under the joyous influence of the three preceding days, and it was a rude shock to him when the priest sent him word to come and make his parting salutation to the Mother, as the time for the immersion ceremony was near at hand. To immerse the Mother in the Ganga ! How could he have the heart to do that ! It was impossible ! So he gave no reply and sat overwhelmed with grief. To the priest's repeated reminders he replied, "No, I can't allow the image to be moved. The Mother shall be worshipped here regularly, and anybody interfering will do so at his peril." Everybody was surprised. The persuasion of the elders had no effect. Mathur clung to his resolve. The news, greatly magnified, at last reached his wife. In her perplexity she went to Sri Ramakrishna, her last refuge, and told him the whole story. The Master went to see Mathur and found him pacing the room excitedly. "Father," he said to Sri Ramakrishna as soon as he saw him, "whatever others may say, I can never allow the Mother to be consigned to the Ganga. I have told them that She shall be worshipped here regularly. Life would be unbearable without Mother !" Sri Ramakrishna stroked Mathur's chest and said, "Oh, is this what makes you afraid ? But who tells you that you will have to live without the Mother ? And where would She go even if you consign the image to the Ganga ? Can the Mother stay away from Her son ? The last three days She has accepted

your worship outside, in your hall, but henceforth She will be much closer to you and accept your worship, being constantly present in your heart !”

That magic touch and those pregnant words restored Mathur's composure. Did he feel the radiant presence of the Mother in his heart ? Who knows ? But he gave his consent to the immersion of the image. Like a real Guru, Sri Ramakrishna lifted his disciple's mind by a touch to a higher plane of consciousness where there was no further need for the external symbol. This marvellous power of the touch was observed again and again in the Master's subsequent dealings with his obstinate disciples at Dakshineswar and elsewhere. What hours of argument could not do, a single touch would accomplish in a second. He explained that when he touched the disciple, the impurities of the mind would be removed, and truth would flash before his purified vision.

The following incident will illustrate Mathur's deep faith in the Master. Once he was bed-ridden at his Jaun Bazar house, with an abscess of a serious type. He was anxious to see Sri Ramakrishna and sent repeated messages to him to come. The Master complied with the request, and came and stood by his bedside. With great difficulty Mathur sat up and asked for the dust of his feet. “What will you do with that,” said the Master, “will that cure your abscess ?” Mathur replied, “For the abscess there is the doctor. But I want the blessings of my Saviour on the eve of my departure from this world.” Sri Ramakrishna immediately fell into a trance, and Mathur, with tears flowing from his eyes, reverently placed his head at the Master's feet. He recovered in a short time.

Sri Ramakrishna's gracious attitude to Mathur was not only maintained throughout the latter's lifetime, but was also extended to his heir. One day he said in an ecstatic mood to Mathur, “I shall remain here as long as you live.” Mathur started in apprehension, for he wished the privilege of association with Sri Ramakrishna for his son Dwaraka. So he said, “Why, Father, Dwari, too, reveres you.” “All right,” said the Master, “I shall be at Dakshineswar as long as he lives.” As a matter of fact, he left Dakshineswar only after the death of Dwarika Nath.

Just as Mathur confided everything to Sri Ramakrishna, so he, too, except when in Samadhi, consulted Mathur on all

matters and sought his advice or opinion like a boy. The relation between them was one of mutual trust and dependence. During as well as after his Sadhana, the Master would inform Mathur whenever he was in need of anything. He would tell of his extraordinary visions to Mathur and ask his opinion. On the other hand he took care to see that Mathur's wealth was usefully spent. All this kindness, no less than his childlike simplicity and helplessness under the normal conditions, completely won over Mathur, who took upon himself the task of protecting Sri Ramakrishna. Finding in him a combination of omniscience with the innocence of a child, Mathur concluded that Sri Ramakrishna's body was to be his care, just as in the subtle spiritual domain he himself was protected by the Master. Mathur's love for Sri Ramakrishna, therefore, assumed a complex character, for in his transcendental state Sri Ramakrishna was the object of his worship, and in the latter's childlike moods Mathur was the comforter.

Nevertheless, it was to Sri Ramakrishna that Mathur would turn when in difficulties. Once he permitted some of his followers to fight those of a rival zemindar, and some men were killed. Finding himself in danger of the law, Mathur hastened to Sri Ramakrishna and implored his protection. The Master at first took him to task saying, "You rogue, every day you make trouble and come to me for help ! What can I do ? Go and bear the consequences of your own deeds. How can I help you ?" But at the continued importunity of Mathur he said at length, "Go your way. It will be as the Mother wills." Mathur escaped arrest.

Living in the company of Sri Ramakrishna and seeing him so often in the state of Bhava-Samadhi, Mathur was determined to taste that bliss for himself. He was thoroughly convinced that Sri Ramakrishna could perform any miracle at his mere wish, for had he not given ample proof that he was God incarnate ? He prayed to the Master for the experience of Bhava-Samadhi. Sri Ramakrishna gave his usual reply, "Wait, wait. In the fullness of time you will experience it by yourself. You are all right, as you are enjoying both secular and spiritual joy. But once you have attained that state, you won't be able to look after your estate, and everything will go to pieces." Mathur was not convinced. The Master then fell back upon

his last resource in such cases and said, "Well, I shall ask Mother about it. She will do what She thinks best." A few days after Mathur actually experienced Bhava-Samadhi in his Jaun Bazar house. He could no longer look after his estate. He sang, laughed, danced, or burst into tears without any reason. Unable to divine the cause of this change in him, his relatives, taking it to be some disease, consulted physicians. But treatment proved futile, and all were anxious. At last Mathur said to them, "I am neither insane nor anything of the kind. Don't be anxious, send for Sri Ramakrishna, and everything will be all right." The Master came. Referring to this incident he would say, "I was sent for. On arriving there I found him in a strong condition. His eyes were red, and tears ran down his cheeks as he spoke of God. There was a tremor in his chest. He clung to my feet and said in a spirit of remorse, 'I crave your forgiveness, Father. For the last three days I have been in this state. In spite of my best efforts, I cannot turn my mind to business, and everything is topsyturvy. Be pleased to take back your Bhava, I don't want it any more.' 'Why,' I said, 'it was you who demanded it,' 'Yes,' said he, 'and I feel its joy too. But if I remain like this, the estate goes to ruin. It is a state that is fit for you and not for me. So please take it back.' I smiled and said, 'I told you so before. But you did not listen to me.' 'Quite true' replied Mathur, 'but how could I know then that it would possess me like a ghost, and that I would not be able to extricate myself when I wished?' I passed my hands over his chest, and he became calm."

Spiritual states require training of the aspirant to make him able to bear their brunt. He must be pure and free from selfish desires. Otherwise these states do not last, or bring about terrific reactions. The seeker after truth cannot be too careful about the necessary preparations.

Mathur cherished a desire to make some permanent provision for Sri Ramakrishna. But he was foiled in his object by the Master's supreme spirit of renunciation. When Chandra Devi was at Dakshineswar, he thought there was an opportunity to fulfil his desire. So one day he pressed her to ask of him anything she wanted. This perplexed the old lady, for she wanted nothing. She said to him, "My son, you have already removed all my wants. I shall inform you if I require anything in future."

I have enough clothing, and you have amply provided for my food. So what more can I want?" Mathur still insisted on her accepting something from him. Chandra Devi thought a moment and then said, "Well, if you must give something, buy for me an anna¹ worth of tobacco leaves. I want to make a tooth-powder." Mathur was moved to tears at this ideal contentment. He saluted her as he said to himself, "Who but such a mother could give birth to a son like Sri Ramakrishna?"

Sri Ramakrishna visited two devotees in company of Mathur. One of them was the famous Devendra Nath Tagore, the founder of the Adi Brahmo Samaj, Calcutta. The Master said to Mathur, "I have heard that Devendra Nath Tagore meditates on God. I would like to visit him." Mathur and Devendra Nath were classmates in the Hindu (now Presidency) College, Calcutta. So Mathur felt free to call on him without a special invitation. One day the party, including Hriday, visited Mr. Tagore. Mathur introduced the Master to his friend, who received him cordially. To determine how far Tagore's body bespoke spirituality, the Master asked him to bare it. When he tucked up his shirt, it showed a crimson glow on his fair chest. Referring to this visit, the Master said later: "When I first met him he appeared to be a bit proud--naturally enough, for he enjoyed wealth, learning, honour, and prestige, to an uncommon degree. With that in mind I addressed Mathur, 'Well what is the genesis of egoism? Is it due to knowledge or ignorance? Can a man who has realized the Brahman be proud of his learning, wisdom or riches?' I was talking with Devendra, when suddenly I was seized with that peculiar state of mind in which I can see through a person. Then even scholars seem as mere straw, unless I find them endowed with discrimination and renunciation. Laughter swelled within me. I found him to be both enjoying the world and leading a religious life. He had many children, all young. So in spite of his being a great Jnani, he had to reconcile himself to the world. I said to him, 'You are the king Janaka of this age. Janaka both enjoyed the world and attained the highest realization. I heard that you have your mind fixed on God though you are in the world, so I have come to see you. Tell me something about Him.' Devendra recited some passages from the Vedas. 'This world,'

¹Equivalent to one-sixteenth of a rupee.

he said, 'is like a chandelier, of which every creature is a bulb.' While meditating in the Panchavati I, too, had a similar vision. Finding his statement tallying with my experience, I thought he must be a very great man. I asked him to explain it. He said, 'Who can know this world? God has created man to proclaim His glory. If there be no lights in the chandelier everything is in darkness; one can't see the chandelier even.' We talked a long time. He was pleased and invited me to attend their Anniversary. 'That depends upon the Lord,' I said, 'you see my condition. There's no knowing in what state He will put me at any particular time.' 'No you must come,' he said, 'but please come dressed in Dhoti and Chaddar. It will pain me if anybody criticises you for being shabbily dressed.' I said, 'That is impossible. I can't be dressed like a Babu.' At this statement of mine Devendra, Mathur, and all laughed. Next day Mathur received a letter from Devendra cancelling the engagement on the plea that it would not be genteel for me to appear in the meeting without a covering for the body !"

The other devotee was Dina Nath Mukherjee, who lived at Baghbazar, Calcutta. This visit was a disappointment, for on that day, Mukherjee's son was being invested with the holy thread. The house was very small and already crowded with visitors who had come to be present at the ceremony, so there was neither room nor leisure for Mukherjee to entertain Sri Ramakrishna and his party. After a brief talk Sri Ramakrishna left.

PILGRIMAGE

Mathur and his wife arranged for a pilgrimage to Northern India and wanted Sri Ramakrishna to accompany them. At their earnest request the master consented¹ to be one of the party, which numbered about one hundred and twenty-five, including Hriday. One second class and three third class cars were reserved, with an arrangement to detach them at any station between Howrah and Mughal Sarai. The party started on January 27, 1868. They halted for a few days at Deoghar to visit the shrine of Vaidyanath. Here an interesting thing happened. One day, while passing through a neighbouring village, Sri Ramakrishna was greatly distressed to see the wretched condition of its people. Moved with sympathy for them, he said to Mathur, "You are steward of the Mother. Feed these poor people and give every one a piece of cloth." Mathur at first hesitated saying, "This pilgrimage will cost a lot of money, and these people are very numerous. We may be short of funds on the journey if we try to feed and clothe them. So what do you say to this, Father?" But Sri Ramakrishna was inexorable. He shed tears at the sight of such abject misery and said in anguish, "Fie upon you! I am not going to Banaras. I prefer to remain with these helpless people." Like a petulant child he left Mathur's company and sat with the poor villagers. At the sight of his compassion, Mathur was much moved and ordered bales of cloth from Calcutta to distribute among them, and he fed them as well. Sri Ramakrishna then cheerfully started for Banaras.

At a wayside station near Mughal Sarai Sri Ramakrishna and Hriday alighted from the train, and it went off without them. Mathur was extremely anxious and from the next station wired to the station-master to send them by the following train. He arranged for a conveyance for Sri Ramakrishna and Hriday, and with a depressed heart proceeded towards Banaras. Fortunately, another train conveying Babu Rajendra Lal Banerjee of

¹ We have it on reliable authority that he had gone on pilgrimage once before about the year 1865. His mother was then of the party. They went up to Allahabad.

Calcutta, a distinguished railway official, came along just then. He saw the sad plight of the Master and Hriday, took them into his carriage and dropped them off at Mughal Sarai.

Sri Ramakrishna arrived within sight of Banaras, the holiest city of India, a place immortalized in its scriptures as the Eternal City of Shiva. As he approached Banaras by boat across the Ganga, he had a strange vision. The holy city actually appeared to him—as the sacred books declare—to be made of gold. It seemed as if the precious thoughts of countless monks and devotees had accumulated there, making the place an abode of the gods; the real Banaras was spiritual, while the external, material one was but its shadow. He was deeply impressed by this glorious vision and for the first few days was scrupulous about maintaining the purity of the place, going outside its spiritual boundary, the stream Asi, for acts likely to defile its sanctity.

Mathur engaged a couple of houses near the Kedarghat. He lived at Banaras in royal style. Whenever he went out, he was surrounded by a number of liveried men who carried his silver umbrella and other paraphernalia. Sri Ramakrishna could not walk; so he was carried in a palanquin. One day Mathur with Sri Ramakrishna visited a zemindar at Banaras. Naturally his parlour was filled with men who discussed worldly matters. Sri Ramakrishna was pained at this and complained to the Divine Mother, "Where hast Thou brought me, Mother? I was far better at Dakshineswar. There I used to have spiritual conversations only, but here people indulge in all sorts of worldly talk."

The very first act of Mathur at Banaras was to give dols of food to scholars. He also invited them and their families to his home, fed them and gave to each a piece of cloth and a rupee in cash. Sri Ramakrishna, with Hriday as attendant, used to visit the shrine of Vishwanath, the presiding Deity of the place, almost daily. He would fall into a trance even on the way, as well as in the presence of the Deity. It is said that his Samadhi was deepest at the temple of Kedarnath.

He also went to visit the noted monks of Banaras. With Mathur he visited a monastery of the Nanakpanthis and was pleased with their great devotion. Another day he paid a visit to the famous Trailanga Swami, who was then under a vow

of silence. The Swami beckoned him to take a seat and held out his snuff-box to him as a mark of welcome. Referring to this visit the Master afterwards said, "I found in him the living manifestation of Vishwanath. Banaras was sanctified by his presence. He was in a state of the highest consciousness, with no idea of the body. He lay cheerfully on the scorching sand. I asked him by a sign if God was one or many. He replied by gestures that God is one when seen in a state of Samadhi, but when looked at through the prism of relative consciousness, He is many. Pointing to him I said to Hriday, 'This is the state of a real Paramahansa.'" Trailanga Swami was then constructing a bathing ghat near the Manikarnika. At the instance of Sri Ramakrishna Hriday dug a few spadefuls of earth for the work, which pleased the Swami greatly. The Master invited him one day to the home of Mathur and entertained him with great respect.

Sri Ramakrishna had a wonderful vision at Banaras, which he often related to his disciples. Mathur used to take him by boat to visit the shrines on the Ganga. On this particular day the boat was gliding past the Manikarnika, where amid columns of smoke, many dead bodies were being cremated. As soon as the Master came upon the scene, he became wild with joy, and hastening to the edge of the boat was lost in Samadhi ! The priest who was acting as a guide and the boatmen stepped forward to prevent him from falling into the river. But they had not to do anything—he stood there perfectly motionless, a divine smile lighting up his countenance, Mathur and Hriday standing by in readiness to help if he should lose his balance. Some minutes passed in this way, and the Master began to come back to normal consciousness. Then they performed the religious rites for which they had come, and returned home. Sri Ramakrishna then told of his vision to all, "I saw a tall figure with a white body and tawny matted locks staidly approach each funeral pyre, and tenderly lifting up the Jiva, breathe into its ears the Supreme Mantra ! The Gracious Mother of the universe, seated on the other side of the pyre, was removing one after another all the coverings of bondage of every Jiva ; and unlocking the gate of Nirvana, She was speeding the fortunate soul to the Absolute. Thus the realization of Advaita which people attain after ages of concentration

and austerity, was brought within the easy reach of those who died at Banaras, through the infinite mercy of Shiva." Everyone was astonished to hear this recital, and the learned scholars who accompanied Mathur remarked, "We learn from the *Kashikanda*¹ that Shiva confers Nirvana on those who die at Banaras; but it is not explicitly stated how. Your vision makes it quite clear. It is strange that your realizations outdo even the scriptural records."

After about a week's stay at Banaras the party moved on to Allahabad, where all bathed in the sacred confluence of the Ganga and the Jamuna. Mathur and others, observing the tradition of the place, shaved their heads, but Sri Ramakrishna refrained from doing so, saying that it was not necessary for him. After three days the party returned to Banaras.

At the end of a fortnight Mathur and his party went to Vrindaban. A house near the Nidhuvan was taken. As in Banaras, he lived in princely style. Sri Ramakrishna was in high spirits in this sacred place, rich in the countless sweet memories of Sri Krishna. He visited the places of interest with characteristic emotions. The following is his description of some of his experiences: "At the sight of Banku Vihari² I was overwhelmed with emotions and ran to embrace him. I was not so impressed by Govindaji. The very sight of the Kaliya Daman Ghat³ used to throw me into ecstasy, and Hriday used to bathe me like a child. I would take a stroll in the evening on the sandy beach of the Jamuna, where there were small thatched huts among the jujube trees. One evening I saw herds of cows returning from their pasture. Followed by cowherd boys they waded the Jamuna. The scene at once suggested Sri Krishna to me, and overwhelmed with emotion I ran crying wildly, 'Where is Krishna, oh, where is Krishna!' I had a desire to visit Shyam Kund and Radha Kund.⁴ They sent me in a palanquin. It was a long distance; so they provided refreshments for the way. I got down to visit the Govardhan hill. The very sight of it overwhelmed me, and I ran to the top, where I stood lost to outward consciousness. The inhabitants of the place brought me

¹ A section of the *Skanda-Purana*.

² A name of Sri Krishna. The temple also is called after Him.

³ Which Sri Krishna freed from the ravages of a terrible snake named Kaliaya.

⁴ Two sacred tanks several miles off Mathura.

down. On the way to Shyam Kund and Radha Kund I saw the old meadows and trees and plants, and birds and deer—rich with associations—and could not contain myself. 'Tears rolled from my eyes and wet my cloth. I thought, 'O Krishna, everything hallowed with Thy association is there, only I can't see Thee !' I was in the palanquin, but had not the power to utter a syllable and could not ask the bearers to stop. Hriday was following and had warned them to be very careful. At Shyam Kund and Radha Kund I found that the Sadhus had made something like thatched huts, in which they were practising devotional exercises with their back to the door lest their eyes see people outside."

At Vrindaban he visited Ganga Mata, a Vaishnava woman devotee, noted for her great spiritual realizations. She was looked upon as an intimate attendant of Sri Radha reincarnated to teach people the secret of divine love. About sixty years old, she had spent the greater part of her life in the village of Barshana, the birthplace of Radhika. At the very first sight she understood the greatness of Sri Ramakrishna, and considered herself blessed to have met him. Sri Ramakrishna was charmed with her piety and devotion. We reproduce here the Master's own description of her and of his association with her: "Ganga Mai used to take great care of me. She was very old and lived all alone in a hut near Nidhuvan. Seeing my condition and loss of consciousness in Samadhi, she often said, 'This is verily Radha reincarnated in flesh and blood !' She used to address me as Dulali.¹ When I was in her company I forgot all about food and drink, or returning to my quarters. On some days Hriday would bring food to her hut and feed me. Ganga Mai, too, used to prepare various things for me. She had frequent trances, which attracted crowds. I had no desire to leave her ; so it was settled that I should remain. I was to take parboiled rice.² Ganga Mai was to have her bed at one end of the room and I at the other. It was arranged in every detail. 'Then Hriday said, 'You are so subject to stomach complaints, who will look after you ?' 'Why,' said Ganga Mai, 'I will look after him, I will serve him.' Well, here was Hriday pulling me by one hand and Ganga Mai by the other. At this moment I was

¹A pet name of Sri Radha.

²Not sunned rice, as he had a weak stomach.

reminded of my mother, who was living alone in the concert-room of the Kali temple at Dakshineswar. I thought, 'Who will look after her if I remain in Vrindaban?' This decided me. I said, 'No, I must go.' He expressed to Hriday his high opinion of this remarkable devotee.

At Vrindaban Sri Ramakrishna adopted the Vaishnava dress, which he wore for a fortnight. He visited Mathura also, where, he said, at the very sight of the Dhruva Ghat he had a vision of Vasudeva crossing the Jamuna with his babe Krishna in his arms.

The Master returned with Mathur's party to Banaras, after staying at Vrindaban for about a fortnight. At Banaras he met the Bhairavi Brahmani, his teacher in the practice of the Tantras. She was living at one of the ghats with another old woman, also a pious soul. Sri Ramakrishna went to see her several times and was pleased at the devotion of her companion. The Master advised the Brahmani to stay at Banaras till the end of her life. She passed away shortly after.

At Banaras Sri Ramakrishna had a great desire to listen to the music of the Vina. Fortunately there was an expert in the Madanpura quarter named Mahesh Chandra Sarkar. The Master waived all ceremony, went to his house and requested him to play for him. Mahesh Chandra gladly consented. The first notes had scarcely fallen on his ears, when Sri Ramakrishna went into Samadhi. Half regaining consciousness, he prayed to the Divine Mother, "Don't take away my consciousness, Mother. I wish to enjoy the Vina." After that he retained consciousness and enjoyed the music, to which he sometimes joined voice. Three hours were spent in this way, when after light refreshments he returned home. After that Mahesh came to Mathur's every day to see the Master.

Mathur stayed at Banaras till May to witness a special decoration of Vishwanath. On his return journey he had a mind to visit Gaya. But Sri Ramakrishna declined to go there, and he had to give up the project. The Master thought that if he once visited that sacred place, his mind would leave the physical plane for ever. He knew of his father's vision at Gaya before his birth, and was convinced that his mind would become permanently absorbed in God there. He considered himself an instrument in the hand of the Mother, and bowed to Her

decree that his body should remain in the world to carry out Her divine purpose. Accordingly the party returned to Calcutta direct.

From Vrindaban the Master had brought a handful of sacred dust, part of which he sprinkled in the Panchavati ; the rest of it he buried in the little cottage where he had practised Sadhana, and said, "Now this place is as sacred as Vrindaban." Shortly after, at his request, Mathur fed a large number of Vaishnavas and gave them money.

HRIDAYRAM AND AKSHAY

We have seen Hriday as the faithful attendant of Sri Ramakrishna from the beginning of his Sadhana. He was a matter-of-fact man, with no place in his heart for sentiment. The ideal of his life was to advance the interests of his little family and to be as comfortable as possible. Constant association with Sri Ramakrishna, at times, generated in his mind ideas of a different nature, yet they were very feeble and short-lived. Whenever there was any chance to satisfy his desire for enjoyment, Hriday would run after it. It was due to this that he failed to see the significance of the wonderful experiences through which Sri Ramakrishna passed before his very eyes during the eventful years at Dakshineswar. But through his genuine love for his uncle and his desire to make him happy and comfortable he developed courage, intelligence, and practical wisdom. So far as the religious life was concerned, he thought there would be time enough for that later on, when his family would have been established in life, and increasing years would dull his desire for pleasure. At this juncture, his wife died, and his whole outlook on life changed. The pleasures of the world lost their savour, and he yearned for God. He began to worship the Divine Mother, meditated now and then, casting off his cloth and holy thread, as he had seen Sri Ramakrishna do, and insisted that the power be given him to realize the higher truths. He thought that as Sri Ramakrishna was so well pleased with his services, he had only to ask to have the glorious results of spiritual practice conferred upon him. The Master told him that he would gain everything by simply serving him, and that everything would be in a muddle if both of them forgot all about the body in their absorption in thoughts of God, since there would be nobody to look after their creature comforts. But Hriday was not to be dissuaded. So the Master was constrained to say, "All right, let Mother's will be done. My wish is of no avail. It was She who revolutionized my mind and made me pass through all those stages of realization. If She wills, you, too, shall have them."

A few days after, Hriday began to have visions and even

fell now and then into states of semi-consciousness during meditation or at worship. Questioned by Mathur about it, the Master said, "Hriday is not feigning these states. He earnestly prayed to Mother to have some visions, and this is the result. She will soon cure him." "No, Father," replied Mathur with a smile, "I am sure it is all your work. Now please bring him down to the normal state, so that we may both serve you. These spiritual states are not for us."

One evening shortly after this, Sri Ramakrishna was going towards the Panchavati. Hriday, thinking he might need his help, followed him. Suddenly he saw a strange sight. His uncle's ordinary, human body disappeared, to be replaced by a luminous one, the effulgence of which radiated in all directions. The shining feet did not touch the earth at all. Hriday rubbed his eyes again and again to make sure that it was not a hallucination. He looked about him. The Ganga, the trees, the buildings, and the temples were as usual. The change was in his uncle. Amazed, he looked at himself, suspecting that there might be a change in him as well ! He was startled to find that he, too, possessed a luminous body—as if, being the eternal attendant of the divine being before him, he had been a part of his essence and assumed a separate form in order to serve him ! The revelation overwhelmed him with joy, and forgetting himself, the world, and its opinions, he shouted frantically again and again, "O Ramakrishna, O Ramakrishna, we are not men—why are we here ? Come, let us go from place to place and save people from their misery. You and I are of one stuff !" "Hush," said Sri Ramakrishna, stopping short at the noise, "what has happened to us that you howl like that ? People will gather about thinking something is wrong." But Hriday would not stop. Hastening to him Sri Ramakrishna touched his chest and prayed, "Mother, stupefy this fool !" Immediately all joy left Hriday, and he found himself hurled back to his normal state, shorn of his glory like a fallen angel. He was very much mortified and wept as he said to Sri Ramakrishna, "Oh, what have you done uncle ! Why do you condemn me to this state ? I shall no more have that ineffable joy." "I do not mean you to be dulled for ever," replied the Master by way of consolation, "I only wished that you might be quiet now. I had to do it, as you raised such a storm over a trifling

vision. I see countless visions at all hours of the day, but do I make a fuss over them? You are not yet fit to see them. Keep quiet now, you will see many more when the time comes."

Hriday became quiet for the time being, but his feelings were hurt. He resolved by intensified effort to see similar visions again. He spent many hours in prayer and meditation. One night he decided to pray to the Mother in the place where Sri Ramakrishna formerly meditated. At dead of night he left his bed, went to the Panchavati, and sat to meditate on Sri Ramakrishna's seat. Shortly after, the Master felt drawn to go there too. When he arrived, he heard Hriday crying piteously, "Save me, uncle, I am going to be burned!" Sri Ramakrishna hastened to the spot and asked him what the trouble was. "No sooner did I sit here to meditate," replied Hriday, writhing in agony, "than I felt as if someone had emptied a tray of live charcoal over me. Oh, the pain is unbearable!" The Master gently stroked his body and said, "You will feel all right again. But tell me, what makes you do these things? Didn't I tell you that you will gain everything by serving me?" Hriday used to say that Sri Ramakrishna's touch removed all pain from his body then and there. Convinced that it would be well for him not to run counter to the wishes of his uncle, he did not use the Panchavati for meditation again.

Though Hriday had faith in Sri Ramakrishna's words, his old duties were becoming distasteful to him. He was on the look-out for new and exciting occupations. It was the autumn of 1868, and he wished to celebrate the Durga Puja at his own home. The Master approved and Mathur helped him with money. Hriday was keen upon taking Sri Ramakrishna with him, but Mathur objected. He wanted the Master to be present at the Puja in his home. Sri Ramakrishna consoled Hriday saying, "Don't grieve Hriday. I shall be there in a subtle body every day to watch your worship. You alone will see me. Get another Brahmin to read out the Mantras to you and conduct the worship in your own fashion. Don't fast altogether, but take milk and Ganga water, at noon, with some candy syrup. If you follow my advice, depend upon it, the Divine Mother will accept your worship." The Master also gave him specific instructions as to who should mould the image, who should act as the assisting priest, and how everything was to be done. Hriday

went home with a joyous heart. During the three days of worship he was astonished to see his uncle standing in a shining body by the side of the image. He returned shortly afterwards and told Sri Ramakrishna of what had happened, at which the latter said, "Yes, at the time of the evening service and again at the Sandhi Puja time, I was really eager to watch your worship. In the trance that followed, I felt myself carried to your chapel, in a shining body, along a luminous track." The Master, in an ecstatic mood, once told Hriday that he would celebrate the Durga Puja thrice. It happened as he said, for Hriday failed in his attempt to celebrate it for the fourth time. Shortly after the first year's celebration, he married a second time and again devoted himself to the worship of Kali and the service of his uncle in the Dakshineswar temple.

The reader is already aware that Sri Ramakrishna had a nephew named Akshay, who was the only son of his brother Ramkumar, and a general favourite in the family. Sri Ramakrishna loved the boy and during his Kamarpukur days often carried him in his arms. As the years passed Akshay grew into a handsome boy. His father, however, had a premonition that the boy would not live long. So he never took him in his arms or caressed him.¹ Akshay was yet a child when Sri Ramakrishna left Kamarpukur and passed through the tempest of Sadhana at Dakshineswar. When Haladhari vacated his office of priest in the Vishnu temple at Dakshineswar, Akshay at the age of seventeen stepped into his place. From his very boyhood he had a special devotion to Sri Ramachandra and spent hours in worshipping Him. At Dakshineswar he was in his element. While worshipping Radhakanta, he would become so much absorbed in meditation that he was unconscious of the presence of spectators. He also spent much time in the worship of Shiva and in reading the *Bhagavata*. This was his regular routine for years. He sometimes practised so hard that blood would spurt from his throat and palate. His sincere faith and devotion endeared him to Sri Ramakrishna.

Shortly after his marriage in 1869, Akshay became seriously ill. On his return to Dakshineswar he had a relapse. The physicians said it was a simple case, but when the fever showed no signs of abating after the first three or four days, the Master

¹ Lest he should become too much attached to him.

said to Hriday, "The doctors have made a mistake. It is a case of typhoid. Consult good physicians for your satisfaction, but the boy won't recover." "God forbid, uncle," said Hriday, "how can you utter such ominous words?" Sri Ramakrishna simply replied, "I don't say these things voluntarily. It is the Mother who makes me speak like that. Do you think I wish Akshay to die?" Hriday was greatly perplexed. He did his utmost for the recovery of the boy. But the illness was gradually aggravated. When the fatal moment arrived, Sri Ramakrishna stood by Akshay's bed and bade him utter the name of Rama. Akshay did so thrice and expired. The event made no impression upon the Master at the time. Rather, in exaltation of spirits he laughed as Hriday wept. The following is his account of the event: "Akshay died before my very eyes. But it did not affect me in the least. I stood by and watched a man die. It was like a sword being drawn from its scabbard. I enjoyed the scene, and laughed and sang and danced over it. They removed the body and cremated it. But the next day as I stood there (pointing to south-eastern verandah of his room), I felt a rack-ing pain for the loss of Akshay, as if somebody were squeezing my heart like a wet towel! I wondered and thought that Mother was teaching me a lesson. I was not much concerned with the body even—much less with a nephew. But if such was my pain at his bereavement, how much more must be the grief of the householders at the loss of their near and dear ones!"

DEATH OF MATHUR

Shortly after the death of Akshay, Mathur took Sri Ramakrishna with him on a tour through his zemindary, perhaps to divert his mind. Hriday was also one of the party. The first noteworthy incident took place at an exceptionally poor village where, as at Vaidyanath, the Master was deeply touched by the miserable condition of its inhabitants. At his passionate appeal Mathur fed the starving people and gave every one a piece of cloth. During this excursion Mathur visited his own village in the Khulna District, and lived for some weeks at the home of the family Guru, where Sri Ramakrishna was cordially received. The party then returned to Dakshineswar.

At Colootollah, in Calcutta, at the house of Kalinath Dutta, a number of devotees of the Vaishnava sect were in the habit of assembling for Sankirtana or the recitation of sacred texts. A seat, decorated with flowers and garlands, was kept sacred to Chaitanya, who was their Chosen Ideal ; it was called "Sri Chaitanya's seat." It was sincerely believed that he occupied it in a subtle form and blessed the ceremonies. One day, at the invitation of the brotherhood, Sri Ramakrishna with Hriday went there. A recitation from the *Bhagavata* was going on, to which the audience was listening attentively, when Sri Ramakrishna entered the room and quietly took his seat. The Master was overpowered with emotion as he listened to the soul-stirring verses of the sacred book. He ran and stood on Sri Chaitanya's seat, absorbed in deep Samadhi, with no vestige of life in his body. His hands were raised as one sees them in the picture of Sri Chaitanya and a seraphic smile played about his lips. The devotees, perceiving that he was in Samadhi, above all barriers of time, place, and circumstance, were caught up in enchantment of the hour. The reader and the audience riveted their eyes on Sri Ramakrishna. Even the most bigotted dared not protest against his seemingly sacrilegious act. In the ecstasy of joy all shouted the name of Hari and commenced a Sankirtana. The music acted upon Sri Ramakrishna's subconscious mind, and he gradually came down to the consciousness of the objective world. He joined in the Sankirtana with his usual fervour, now dancing

in an extremely graceful way, and again standing still lost in divine emotion. After some time the Sankirtana came to a close amid joyous shouts of the Lord's name, and Sri Ramakrishna returned to Dakshineswar.

After his departure there set in a reaction in the minds of the devotees. Some of them criticized Sri Ramakrishna's action, while others justified it. They wrangled for a time, but no conclusion was reached. Now there lived at Kalna, in the district of Burdwan, a great Vaishnava saint, named Bhagavan Das Babaji, who was honoured throughout Bengal for his spirituality. He was over eighty, and devotees from far and near flocked to him and sought his counsel on disputed matters of spiritual import. The members of the Colootollah congregation consulted him about this occurrence. Bhagavan Das was greatly annoyed to hear that the sacred seat of Sri Chaitanya, his Chosen Deity, had been desecrated by a man whom nobody knew. He criticized the action sharply and suggested precautions against a repetition of the offence. Needless to say, Sri Ramakrishna knew nothing of all this.

Soon after the incident, in the year 1870, Sri Ramakrishna set out by boat with Mathur and Hriday to Nadia, the birth-place of Sri Chaitanya. On the way they touched at Kalna to see Bhagavan Das Babaji. Arriving there in the morning, Mathur busied himself in arranging for lodgings, while Sri Ramakrishna went with Hriday to visit the Babaji. It was frequently observed that the Master, like a child, felt shy and diffident at first in the presence of distinguished strangers. Such was now the case. He sent Hriday ahead and followed him at a short distance, covering himself with a sheet. The Babaji had already had a premonition that a great saint must have arrived, and had expressed himself to that effect. Seeing that no one but Hriday had come, he resumed his conversation about a Vaishnava who had been guilty of some misdeed, and ordered his expulsion from the sect. As Hriday at this point said to him with a bow, "My uncle, who becomes overpowered with emotion at the mere mention of the name of God, has come to pay his respects to you." Sri Ramakrishna entered the room and humbly took a seat to one side, after saluting him. His face was almost veiled from view. The Babaji returned Sri Ramakrishna's salute and exchanged a few words with him about

where he lived etc., etc. Seeing Bhagavan Das telling his beads Hriday said, "Sir, why do you tell your beads? You are a man of realization, and need do so no longer." The Babaji answered, "I may not require it myself, but I keep up the practice as an example to others. Otherwise they might go astray in trying to imitate me."

Sri Ramakrishna could contain himself no longer. Depending entirely like a child upon the Divine Mother, his spirit of resignation was so complete and so natural that not only did he do nothing on his own initiative, but the sight of others doing or saying things from an egoistic standpoint was extremely painful to him. Even in ordinary conversation he seldom spoke of himself in the first person except as a servant of God. So these egoistic words of Bhagavan Das irritated him greatly. He stood up and said, "What! You dare to think like that! You pose as a teacher! You will expel a man from the society! You continue or give up a religious practice at will! Who are you to teach men? You dare not teach the world unless He who is its Lord and Ruler allows you to do so." The sheet had fallen from his body, even the wearing cloth had dropped and a halo appeared about his face. As he finished speaking, overwhelmed with emotion he fell into Samadhi! All gazed spell-bound at his majestic figure, and none dared to utter a word. The Babaji, who was accustomed to being addressed with respect, was surprised at this sudden outburst, but the irresistible authority with which the words were spoken went straight to his heart; his eyes were opened to his mistake. He realized that he was nothing but a humble servant of the Lord—a mere instrument in His hands. Far from being resentful he studied the Master closely and was charmed with the unmistakable marks of spiritual greatness in him. In the conversation that followed, Sri Ramakrishna went into frequent trances, and the Babaji's judgement was confirmed. And when he found that this was the man who had occupied the sacred seat of Sri Chaitanya at Colootollah, he regretted his criticism and asked pardon. Sri Ramakrishna recounted the whole incident to Mathur, praising the realizations of the Babaji at the same time. Mathur also went to visit the Babaji and gave money to the Ashrama for a feast.

From Kalna the party proceeded to Nadia. When the boat

passed by the sand-banks close to the town, Sri Ramakrishna was beside himself with emotion, and Hriday had to hold him fast lest he should fall into the Ganga. He was calm again when the boat touched land. Curiously enough, in the town he experienced no exaltation of feeling—a sure index to him of its spiritual worth—although he visited one temple after another. He was disappointed at the lack of divinity manifested there. After finishing his rounds he returned to his boat and went a short distance off shore. Suddenly a wonderful vision greeted his eyes. He used to say, “Two boys,¹ bright as molten gold, with aureoles round their heads, rushed smiling towards me through the air with uplifted hands. ‘They come, they come,’ I cried. In the twinkling of an eye they came and entered into this body (meaning himself), and I fell down unconscious. I would have fallen into the water but for Hriday, who caught hold of me.” Being asked about it by Mathur, he said that old Nadia, the real birth-place of Sri Gauranga, had been engulfed by the river, and that those sand-banks marked its ancient site. This was the reason for his exaltation there, instead of in the town.²

It was now sixteen years since Mathur had first met Sri Ramakrishna. A wonderful change was wrought in his mind during this time. In the month of July, 1871, Mathur was suddenly taken down with typhoid fever. From the beginning Sri Ramakrishna knew that this was to be the end for Mathur—that the Divine Mother was going to take him back to Her bosom. Though he did not go himself to see him, Sri Ramakrishna sent Hriday every day to make inquiries. The fateful day arrived; Mathur was taken over to Kalighat. That day the Master did not send Hriday, but fell into a deep trance, which lasted two or three hours. The form remained at Dakshineswar, but the spirit flew to devotee's side to bless his last moments. After 5 o'clock Sri Ramakrishna regained outward consciousness and called Hriday to him. “Well,” he said, “Mathur's soul has ascended to the Deviloka, or the sphere of the Mother!” Hriday was silent. Late at night the news reached Dakshineswar that Mathur had passed away at 5 p.m.

One day a devotee, interested in the Master's account of

¹ Meaning Sri Chaitanya and Nityananda.

² Subsequent research seems to corroborate this view.

Mathur's wonderful personality and unique relationship with him, asked in curiosity, "Sir, what became of him after death ? He won't have to be born again, will he ?" The Master replied. "Perhaps he has been born again as a prince. He had hankerings for enjoyment." He spoke of something else, letting the matter drop.

With the death of Mathur there passed away a figure closely associated with Sri Ramakrishna during the most eventful epoch to his life. The closeness of their relationship must have been pre-ordained, for evidently Mathur's mission was to look after the Mother's beloved Child ; and we have seen how faithfully he discharged this sacred task. With his passing, Sri Ramakrishna's life took a new direction ; and a new group, to whom we shall presently introduce our readers, came on the stage.

THE HOLY MOTHER AT DAKSHINESWAR

The last that we saw of the Holy Mother was at Kamarpukur, under the tutelage of Sri Ramakrishna. This holy association filled the pure-hearted girl with unspeakable delight. Referring to this joy she said later on, "I used to feel always as if a pitcher full of bliss were placed in my heart—the joy was ineffable." When, a few months later, Sri Ramakrishna returned to Dakshineswar, she went back to her father's home, the happiest girl in the world. As a result of this inward bliss her character was completely transformed. She became more gentle, more thoughtful, and more unselfish, developing an unbounded love for all creatures. She was the very embodiment of kindness. Physical discomforts or unkind treatment were powerless to ruffle the serenity of her mind. She passed her days at Jayrambati, ungrudgingly serving her relatives, though her heart was at Dakshineswar, at the feet of the Master. Much as she would have liked at times to see him and to be near him, she consoled herself with the thought that he would call her to his side at the right moment. With this conviction Sarada Devi held herself in readiness.

Four years passed, and she was now a young woman of eighteen. Poised as she was, by reason of her inward bliss, above the ordinary joys and sorrows of the world, still she was not deaf to the idle gossip of the people of her village about her saintly husband, whom they described as mad. To them there was no other epithet applicable to a man who, regardless of all physical comfort, passed his entire time in chanting the name of the Lord. Some of her companions looked upon her with pity or scorn as the wife of a mad man. Though she patiently bore these inflictions, her heart was lacerated, and she would think, "Is it true that he is insane? Is he no longer the man I knew at Kamarpukur? If indeed matters have come to such a pass, then I must not be separated from him any longer. I should be at his side to serve him to the best of my ability." After much thought she decided to go to Dakshineswar to see for herself. An opportunity to do so soon presented itself.

During the Dol Purnima festival people from distant places

come to bathe in the sacred waters of the Ganga. Some distant relatives of Sarada Devi resolved to go to Calcutta for this purpose. She begged leave to accompany them. The ladies thought it wise to speak about it to her father. He was quick enough to understand his daughter's real motive in going to Calcutta, and arranged to accompany her himself. As there was no railway and a palanquin was too costly for them, there was no alternative but to travel the distance of sixty miles on foot. They set out on the appointed day and walked on and on, the beautiful scenery helping to relieve the tedium of the journey. For two or three days all went well. Then, to the mortification of Sarada Devi, she fell ill of a high fever, and it became imperative to interrupt the journey and to stop at an inn. But comfort came to her in a vision. She said afterwards, "As I lay unconscious with fever, I saw an exceptionally lovely young girl of dark complexion sitting beside me. She passed her cool and tender hands over my body, taking away most of the burning sensation. 'Where do you come from?' I asked. 'From Dakshineswar,' she replied. 'From Dakshineswar!' I said in surprise, 'I long to go there—to meet him and serve him. But this fever has upset everything.' 'Why,' said the girl, 'you shall go to Dakshineswar when you get well, and meet him. I have kept him there for your sake.' I said, 'You are so kind! Who are you, pray?' 'I am your sister,' she replied. I said, 'Ah, that's why you have come.' After this conversation I fell asleep."

Next morning Ram Chandra found that his daughter was free from fever, and the journey was resumed. After going a short distance they came across a palanquin, which they engaged and reached Dakshineswar at 9 o'clock at night (March, 1872).

Sri Ramakrishna was much disturbed at seeing Sarada Devi in such a weakened condition. He arranged for a separate bed for her in his own room, and said again and again with regret, "Ah, you have come too late—my Mathur is no longer here to look after you!" But with the good treatment and nursing under the personal supervision of the Master, she recovered in three or four days. He then sent her to live with his mother in the concert-room.

Convinced after a few days' stay at Dakshineswar that Sri Ramakrishna was unchanged in his attitude towards her, Sarada Devi decided to remain and give herself over to the service of Sri

Ramakrishna and his mother. Thereupon her father returned to his home, rejoicing in the thought that his daughter was happy with her husband.

Sri Ramakrishna now resumed his old task of teaching his wife, testing at the same time his own realizations and discharging his duties as a husband. Those who move through the world wholly dependent on the will of the Lord, have no plans ahead; they wait and watch for guidance in everything they do. Hence they neither court any test nor shirk it when it comes. When Sri Ramakrishna took upon himself the task of training his wife at Kamarpukur, it was because it seemed to be the right thing to be done at the time. His departure for Dakshineswar was but an interruption. Now he took up the work again at the point where he had left off. His teaching covered a wide range of subjects from housekeeping to the knowledge of Brahman. Not content with mere instructions, he took particular care to see that she carried out his injunctions, lovingly correcting any mistake. ~

One of the important lessons he gave to Sarada Devi at this time was: "God is everybody's beloved, just as the moon is dear to every child. Everyone has an equal right to pray to Him. Out of His grace He manifests Himself to all who call upon Him. You, too, will see Him if you but call upon Him."

Some months after the Holy Mother's arrival, there arose a curious desire in Sri Ramakrishna's mind, which he lost no time in gratifying. It was the new moon of May, 1872, an auspicious night for the worship of Kali, and Sri Ramakrishna made special arrangements for it in his own room, instructing the Holy Mother to be present. She went there at 9 p.m. Sri Ramakrishna took the seat of the priest. After the preliminaries were over, he beckoned the Holy Mother to the seat which was reserved for the Goddess. Sarada Devi was in a semi-conscious state as she reverently watched the proceedings, and like one under a hypnotic spell, took the seat as she was told. Sri Ramakrishna with the help of an assistant, went through the regular form of worship, in which the Holy Mother took the place of the Deity. During the ceremony she went into Samadhi. The Master, too, when he had finished the Mantras, went into the superconscious state. Priest and Goddess were joined in a transcendental union in the Self. Hours passed. At dead of

night the Master partially recovered consciousness; then with the appropriate Mantras he surrendered himself and the fruits of his lifelong Sadhana, together with his rosary, at the feet of the Holy Mother and saluted her.

With this sacred ceremony, called in the Tantras the Shodashi Puja or the worship of the Woman, was finished the long series of Sri Ramakrishna's spiritual practices. It was the consummation of his Sadhana, in which he dedicated his all to the Mother of the universe, manifested through the living symbol of Sarada Devi. To his illumined vision everything in the universe became the symbol of God. His sweeping glance encompassed both Absolute and Manifestation, so that like the Rishi of the Upanishad he might say, "Thou art the woman, and Thou art the man. Thou art the boy, and Thou art the girl. Thou art the old man tottering on his crutches. Thou pervadest the universe, born in multiple forms."

The Holy Mother continued to live at Dakshineswar, enjoying the Master's divine company. The following are her reminiscences of those blissful days: "I have no words to describe my wonderful exaltation of spirit as I watched him in different states. Under the influence of divine emotion he would sometimes talk on abstruse subjects, sometimes laugh, sometimes weep, and again become perfectly motionless in Samadhi! This would continue throughout the night. There was such an extraordinary Divine Presence in him that I used to shake with fear, and wonder how the night would pass. I understood little of trances then. One day, finding his Samadhi would not break, I was terribly afraid, and wept and sent for Hriday. He came and uttered the Lord's name in his ear for some time before he could bring him back to consciousness! Then, finding that I suffered, the Master himself taught me to utter such and such names of the Lord when particular kinds of trance set in, or such and such Mantras when there were other symptoms. After this I had less fear, for he would regain consciousness when those methods were adopted. Months passed in this way. Then one day he discovered that I had to keep awake the whole night lest he should go into Samadhi—for it might come on at any moment—and asked me to sleep in the concert-room." She used to say that in those days the Master taught her everything—beginning with such details of domestic life as how a lamp was

to be trimmed, how she was to behave with the different members of her family according to their different natures, and how she should conduct herself while visiting, up to the highest spiritual subjects such as prayer, chanting of the Lord's name, meditation, Samadhi, and even realization of the Brahman. How different from the married life of the ordinary man ! One stands in awe before such a lofty example.

One day Sarada Devi, as she was massaging the Master's feet, asked him, "What do you think of me ?" Quick came the answer, "The Mother who is worshipped in the temple is the mother who has given birth to this body and is now living in the concert-room, and she again is massaging my feet at this moment. Verily I always look upon you as the visible representation of the Blissful Mother." One day, finding his wife asleep by his side, Sri Ramakrishna thus said to himself, "Here is a woman's body which the world holds so dear. But he who takes pleasure in it is confined to the body and cannot realize God. Tell me frankly whether you want this or God. If the former, then here it is." His purified mind answered this searching question by merging in a Samadhi so deep that it lasted the night. Next morning, after considerable difficulty, he was brought back to consciousness by the repetition of the Lord's name in his ear.

Months passed in this way, but not once did the minds of this divine couple come down to the plane of sense. This was possible, because both husband and wife had their minds attuned to the Infinite. Sri Ramakrishna complimented Sarada Devi in unequivocal terms. He used to say, "After marriage I anxiously prayed to the Divine Mother to root out all sense of physical enjoyment from her mind. That my prayer had been granted, I knew from my contact with her during this period."

When even after the lapse of a year or more Sri Ramakrishna felt not the least trace of body-idea in his mind, and continued to look upon Sarada Devi sometimes as the manifestation of the Divine Mother and sometimes as the Atman or Brahman. He understood that the Mother had brought him successfully through the ordeal, and that, through Her grace his mind was able to remain without any effort on his part on the highest plane of spiritual realization. He felt that the grace of the Divine Mother had brought him to the end of his

Sadhanas, and his mind was so absorbed in Her lotus feet that no thought entered in it, consciously or unconsciously, that was contrary to Her will.

The Holy Mother returned to Kamarpukur about the month of November, 1873, after staying a year and eight months with her husband.

AT THE END OF HIS SADHANA

About a year later, Sri Ramakrishna, through his contact with Shambhu Charan Mallik of Calcutta, who among other scriptures was acquainted with the Bible, decided to realize the Divine Mother by a new method, viz Christianity. Shambhu was well known for his generosity. He had a garden close to the Dakshineswar Kali temple, which Sri Ramakrishna frequently visited. In the course of the intimacy which thus grew up, Shambhu came to regard Sri Ramakrishna with sincere love and esteem, and after Mathur's death it was he who came forward to serve the Master and gladly supplied all his wants. He addressed Sri Ramakrishna as "Guruji" or teacher. The Master would sometimes resent this saying, "Who is a Guru and to whom? You are my 'Guru.'" But Shambhu would not give in and persisted in using the epithet till the end. Though not a Christian, he used to read the Bible to Sri Ramakrishna, who thus came to know about Christ and Christianity. So when the desire to realize the Christian ideal arose in his mind, the Divine Mother fulfilled it in a strange way, without any struggle on his part. One day the Master was in the parlour of the garden-house of Jadu Nath Mallik at Dakshineswar, on the walls of which were many beautiful portraits, one of them being Christ's. Sri Ramakrishna was looking attentively at the picture of the Madonna with the Divine Child and reflecting on the wonderful life of Christ, when he felt as though the picture had become animated, and that rays of light were emanating from the figures of Mary and Christ, and entering into him, altogether changing his mental outlook. When he realized that his Hindu ideas were being pushed into a corner by this onrush of new ones, he tried his best to stop it and eagerly prayed to the Divine Mother, "What is it that Thou art doing to me, Mother?" But in vain. His love and regard for the Hindu gods were swept away by this tidal wave, and in their stead a deep regard for Christ and the Christian church filled his heart, and opened to his eyes the vision of Christian devotees burning incense and candles before the figure of Jesus in the churches and offering unto him the eager outpourings of their hearts. Returning to the Dakshineswar

temple he was so engrossed in these thoughts that he forgot to visit the Divine Mother in the temple. For three days those ideas held sway in his mind. On the fourth day, as he was walking in the Panchavati, he saw an extraordinary-looking person of serene aspect approaching him with his gaze intently fixed on him. He knew him at once to be a man of foreign extraction. He had beautiful large eyes, and though the nose was a little flat, it in no way marred the comeliness of his face. Sri Ramakrishna was charmed and wondered who he might be. Presently the figure drew near, and from the inmost recesses of Sri Ramakrishna's heart there went up the note, "There is the Christ who poured out his heart's blood for the redemption of mankind and suffered agonies for its sake. It is none else but that Master-Yogin Jesus, the embodiment of Love !"

Then the Son of Man embraced Sri Ramakrishna and became merged in him. The Master lost outward consciousness in Samadhi, realizing his union with the Brahman with attributes. After some time he came back to the normal plane. Thus was Sri Ramakrishna convinced that Jesus Christ was an Incarnation of the Lord.

Long after, in discussing Christ with his disciples who were able to speak English, he asked, "Well, you have read the Bible. Tell me what it says about the features of Christ. What did he look like ?" They answered, "We have not seen this particularly mentioned anywhere in the Bible. But Jesus was born among the Jews ; so he must have been fair, with large eyes and an aquiline nose." Sri Ramakrishna only remarked, "But I saw his nose was a little flat—who knows why !" Not attaching much importance to these words at the time, the disciples, after the passing away of Sri Ramakrishna, heard that there were three descriptions extant of Christ's features, and one of these actually described him as flat-nosed !

It will be worth while to note here Sri Ramakrishna's opinion of Buddha and other great founders of religion. About Buddha he shared the general notion of the Hindus that he was an Incarnation of God. He used to offer him his sincere devotion and worship, and believed that in the holy triad at the temple of Jagannath it was the Lord Buddha's personality that was still worshipped. He had a great regard for the sacramental food of Jagannath, which, like the water of the Ganga, he considered

supremely purifying. Hearing about the toleration of all religions in the temple at Puri, he was at one time eager to go there, but knowing the possibility of his body succumbing to the shock of associations which the place was sure to hold for him—for one Incarnation, Sri Chaitanya, had passed away there—he refrained from going. On another occasion he remarked, “There is not the least doubt about Lord Buddha’s being an Incarnation. There is no difference between his doctrines and those of the Vedic Jnanakanda.” We have every reason to believe that he spoke thus because of his supernatural insight.

About the Tirthankaras who founded the Jain religion, and the ten Sikh Gurus, Sri Ramakrishna heard a good deal in his later life from the lips of representatives of those communities, and came to entertain a great regard for them. In his room at Dakshineswar there were a small statue of Tirthankara Mahavira and a portrait of Christ, before which incense was burnt morning and evening. But he was never heard to speak of the Tirthankaras or the Sikh Gurus as Incarnations of God. Of the latter he used to say, “They are all incarnations of the saintly king Janaka. I have heard it said by the Sikhs that just before attaining liberation he was possessed with the idea of doing good to the world. So he was born successively as the ten Gurus of the Sikhs, and after founding the Sikh religion was united for ever with the Supreme Brahman. There is no reason to disbelieve this.”

In the state of Divine communion at the end of all his Sadhanas there came to him many intuitive perceptions, some of which were in relation to himself, others in connection with spirituality in general. Though these revelations were the outcome of his supersensuous perception, yet we may try to express them in terms of human reasoning.

About himself he came to the following conclusions:

First, that he was an Incarnation of God, a specially commissioned personage, whose spiritual achievements were for the benefit of others. Comparing his own life with that of the usual seeker after truth, he was convinced of the great gulf that lay between. He saw that the ordinary aspirant, after a lifelong struggle, was satisfied with realization of any one aspect of the Lord, whereas he could not rest till he had realized Him in all. He was aware that it took him an incredibly short time to attain

realization of any particular phase. That could not but mean that there was some peculiarity in his mental constitution which made it relatively easy for him to attain the supreme spiritual level. He was forced to acknowledge that he was exceptional; that his extraordinary spiritual struggle and realizations were not for himself, but to usher in a new era of spiritual unfoldment and to show mankind how to overcome the obstacles on the way to realization.

Secondly, he knew that he had always been a free soul; that the various Sadhanas through which he had passed were not really necessary for him as they were for others. So the term Mukti or liberation was not applicable to him. From another angle, liberation was equally impossible for him, for just so long as there were beings who considered themselves bound, the Incarnation would have to come and show them the way out of their bondage. As Sri Ramakrishna used to say, "A zemindar's officer will have to run to any part of the estate where there is trouble." He used to tell his disciples that next time he would have to re-incarnate himself *there* (pointing to the north-west). Some of these disciples, among whom was the great actor-dramatist, Girish Chandra Ghosh, of Bengal, have said that the Master also gave a hint as to the time this would occur, saying, "Two hundred years later I shall have to go there. Then many will be liberated, and those who will fail then, will have to wait for a long time!"

Thirdly, he came to foresee the time of his passing. One day, in an ecstatic mood, he spoke of it thus to the Holy Mother: "When you find me taking the food touched by a non-Brahmin, passing nights in Calcutta, and feeding another and eating the remnants—then know that the day for my leaving this body is near at hand." These words of the Master were literally fulfilled.

Another day, also in an ecstatic mood at Dakshineswar, he said to the Holy Mother, "Towards the end I shall take nothing but liquid milk preparations." This statement, too, came true.

About spiritual matters in general the following were his convictions:

First, as the result of his realization through all forms of discipline, he was firmly convinced that all religions were true—that every doctrinal system represented a path to God. The

demonstration of this seems to be the special object of Sri Ramakrishna's advent into the world. He was the first Incarnation who, so far as history goes, went through all the different varieties of religious practices in order to prove that fact. If universality be the touchstone of greatness, Sri Ramakrishna stands conspicuous among the Great Ones.

Secondly, the three great systems of thought known as Dualism, Qualified Monism, and Monism—Dvaita, Vishishtadvaita, and Advaita—he perceived to be but different stages in man's progress towards the Goal. He held that they were not contradictory, but complementary, being suited to different mental outlooks. The far-reaching consequences of this realization will be patent upon reflection to all. Every student of religion knows what a storm of conflicting opinions has been raised among scholars over these progressive systems. Not perceiving their underlying harmony, every sect has tried interpretation from one point of view, to the exclusion of the other two, with the result that philosophical discussions have become a bugbear to some, or driven others in despair to agnosticism or atheism. Hence the need of a prophet who by personal realization of the inner significance of all of them would remove misunderstanding. The following are some of his statements:

"The Advaita is the last word in Realization. It is something to be felt in Samadhi, for it transcends mind and speech."

"The mind and intellect can comprehend and put in terms of language the range of thought up to the Vishishtadvaita and no further. In its perfection, the Absolute and Manifestation are seen to be equally real—the Lord's name, His abode, and He Himself are found to be composed of the one spiritual substance. Everything is spiritual, the variance being only in form."

"For the ordinary man with strong attachment to the senses, the dualistic forms of religion, in which are embodied some amount of material support, like music and symbols, are useful."

As to action and inaction he had to say, "A man whose mind is absolutely pure naturally goes beyond action. He cannot work even if he tries to, or the Lord does not allow him to work. Just as when a young wife is going to be a mother, she is given less and less work to do; and when the child is born, she gives up household work altogether and is busied exclusively with the child. But the ordinary man must try to do his duties

unattached, depending on the Lord, like the maidservant who does everything for her master, but knows in her heart that her home is elsewhere. This is known as Karma-Yoga. One should as far as possible take the name of the Lord and meditate on Him, while discharging one's everyday duties in an unattached way."

Thirdly, Sri Ramakrishna realized the Mother's wish that through him She would found a new Order, comprising those who would uphold the universal doctrines illustrated in his life.

Lastly, his spiritual insight told him that those who were having their last birth—those who had sincerely called on the Lord at least once—must come to him. The reader is at liberty to take this statement in a universal sense, or in a mere personal way, as he chooses.

BEREAVEMENTS

At this time Rameshwar, who was the head and financial support of the Chatterji family, passed away at Kamarpukur, where he had gone to rest and recuperate, leaving two sons and a daughter. Rameshwar was prepared for the end, for he had been warned before he left Dakshineswar by Sri Ramakrishna that he would never return. According to his wishes, his body was cremated on the road-side, so that his ashes might be touched by the feet of devout passers-by.

Rameshwar possessed a royal heart which could never say "nay" to any Sannyasin or Fakir. He even gave away the utensils of the house, for it was his profound belief that no man who had the welfare of others at heart could ever suffer from want. Naturally he was widely mourned. His son Ramlal succeeded him at the Dakshineswar temple.

When the sad news reached Dakshineswar, Sri Ramakrishna became greatly concerned for his aged mother. Chandra Devi was very old and had suffered many bereavements, and this new shock might be too much for her. He prayed to the goddess in the Kali temple to sustain his mother in this affliction. Then he went to her with tears in his eyes and broke the sad news to her. He was agreeably surprised to find that she took it quite calmly, remarking, "This world is unreal. Everybody must die some day or other. So it is useless to mourn." He saw that in response to his prayer the Divine Mother had pitched her mind to a high key, and he thanked Her again for Her kindness and for freeing him from anxiety.

The Holy Mother came to Dakshineswar for the second time probably in April, 1874. She made the trip in the company of a party of women pilgrims from her village, who wished to bathe in the Ganga at Calcutta during a coming eclipse. She gradually fell behind, because she was unable to walk fast. She told the rest not to wait for her, but to go on to Tarakeswar, where she would rejoin them the next day. The way led through extensive waste lands, notorious for dacoits. Evening was closing in, and the Holy Mother was becoming nervous and wondering what to do, when she saw a tall, dark man, with a long stick

approaching at a rapid pace. She was much alarmed at first, thinking he might be a bandit, but when he came up to her, and she explained her predicament, he offered his protection and that of his wife who was following him, and escorted her to a neighbouring shop. The next morning he and his wife accompanied her to Tarakeswar, where she rejoined the rest of the party. The Holy Mother was filled with gratitude for their kindness, called them her father and mother, and made them promise to come to see her at Dakshineswar. They kept their word and visited the Holy Mother a number of times at the temple garden, where they met Sri Ramakrishna, who treated them with much kindness.

At Dakshineswar she lived in her old quarters, the concert-room, with her mother-in-law. It was too small for two persons, and Shambhu Charan built a hut for her on a piece of land adjacent to the Kali temple. Captain Vishwanath Upadhyaya—another devotee, of whom we shall presently speak—supplied the necessary timber. The Holy Mother moved to her new hut, where she had a maidservant to assist her. Every day she cooked Sri Ramakrishna's food and brought it to him in the temple. The Master used to spend some time there every day. Only once because of heavy rain did he stay overnight. After severe attack of dysentery she returned to Jayrambati, probably in September, 1875. Shortly after, she had a severe relapse, and her condition became critical. Sri Ramakrishna was grieved to hear of this and said to Hriday, "Well, Hriday, what if she should die without attaining the object of human life?" In her extremity Sarada Devi, on the advice of her brother, Unesh, went to the temple of the local goddess, Simhavahini, and lay there without food, determined to end her life if she were not cured. A few hours later she and her mother were told of and given some medicines which cured her in a few days.

A few months after the Holy Mother's departure from Dakshineswar, an important event took place in the Kali temple. It was the passing of Chandra Devi in March, 1876, on the fortieth birthday of Sri Ramakrishna. She was very old, and for some time age had robbed her of much of her physical and mental powers, though she still retained her spiritual force. Hriday gave the following account of her death. One day he was about to start for his native village, when he felt a strange

hesitation, as if the shadow of some approaching danger was upon him. He spoke of it to Sri Ramakrishna, who advised him not to go. Three days passed quietly. Every day Sri Ramakrishna spent some time with his mother and tended to her wants. On the fourth evening he paid his usual visit to her and remained with her till mid-night, and left her fairly well. Next morning her door remained closed till 8 o'clock, which was unusual. The maidservant called out, but got no response; putting her ear to the door, she was frightened to hear stertorous breathing. She ran to inform Sri Ramakrishna and Hriday. The latter hastened to the spot, opened the door, and found the old lady unconscious. Minute quantities of milk and Ganga water kept her alive for three days. When her last moments arrived she was taken to the brink of the Ganga. Sri Ramakrishna made an offering of flowers at her feet, and her soul quietly passed away. Being a Sannyasin, he did not perform the funeral rites; these, as well as the "Shraddha" ceremony, were performed by his nephew, Ramlal. Later Sri Ramakrishna had a desire to make oblations of water (Tarpana) to his mother, as did other sons, but his fingers became stiff and separated, so that all the water ran out. He tried again and again, but without success, whereupon he wept. Later on he heard from a man versed in the scriptures that in a certain stage of spiritual advancement the Sadhaka is freed from the ordinary prescribed duties and cannot perform them.

Shambhu Charan Mallik of whose devotion to Sri Ramakrishna we already know, succumbed to diabetes about this time. His wife was his worthy partner and served Sri Ramakrishna and the Holy Mother with great fidelity. The Master went to see him on his deathbed and on his return remarked to Hriday, "The oil in Shambhu's lamp has run out." His words, alas, proved too true. Noble and God-fearing, Shambhu retained his courage to the last. Just a few days before his death, he remarked cheerfully to Hriday, "I am not at all anxious about the end. I am ready with my kit for the journey!" Shambhu was one of those great souls whom the Divine Mother had shown to Sri Ramakrishna as one of his own, and on their first meeting the Master recognized him as such. Shambhu, as he used to say, was his second Rasaddar or supplier of necessities, appointed by the Mother Herself after Mathur's death to

look to his comforts.

In this connection we must tell of one incident of Sri Ramakrishna's life which shows how deeply the spirit of truthfulness was ingrained in his nature, and how even in his unguarded moments the Divine Mother protected him. Shambhu had a dispensary for the poor in his garden. Learning that Sri Ramakrishna was a frequent sufferer from diarrhoea, he advised him to take a few doses of opium, and offered to give some before he left. Sri Ramakrishna agreed. But in the course of the conversation both forgot about it. After taking his leave the Master went a few steps, when he remembered about the opium. Coming back he found that Shambhu was busy. Not wishing to trouble him, Sri Ramakrishna took a little opium from one of the men in charge and again set out for the Kali temple. But to his surprise he found that though he was perfectly familiar with the locality, he kept straying into wrong paths. Casting his eyes behind, he could plainly see the path leading to Shambhu's place, but the way ahead was not clear. Wondering, he went back and again started for Rani Rasmani's garden, carefully noting the way. Again he became confused. He could not find the right path, and felt a backward pull as well. After repeated struggles, it suddenly came to him that Shambhu had asked him to take the opium from him, not from his agent, who had no right to give it without permission. He might have been guilty of falsehood and theft if the Divine Mother had not deterred him! So he threw the package back through a window, calling out as he did so, "Look, I am returning your opium." Now as he set out for the temple he could see the way clearly—there was no spell over his mind—and he safely reached it. Returning to this incident he said afterwards, "It is because I have placed my whole responsibility upon the Mother, that She holds me by the hand and never allows me to stray even by an inch from the path."

Captain Vishwanath Upadhyaya of the Nepal State, whom we have just mentioned, was descended from a line of brave and pious Brahmin ancestors. His father was a Colonel in the Indian army and used to worship the Lord Shiva even in the battle-field. Vishwanath was a great scholar and devotee. He had a passion for reading the scriptures and knew the Gita, *Bhagavata*, and Vedanta by heart. Every day he worshipped his

Chosen Deity with scrupulous attention to detail. He was a distinguished officer in the Nepal Raj, and at the time of which we are speaking, was in charge of the State timber-yard opposite Calcutta. One time he saw in a dream a man surrounded by a circle of light beckoning to him to come and receive the highest spiritual knowledge. It was not so long after that he heard that a great devotee was living in the Rani Rasmani's garden at Dakshineswar. He set out to meet him and to his utter astonishment found him to be the man of his dream. He was so attracted to the Master that he stayed the night there. Sri Ramakrishna treated him like an old friend. Thenceforth Vishwanath visited Dakshineswar frequently.

He was a truth-loving man. Once some timber in his yard was carried away by a tide in the Ganga, causing great loss to the State. He postponed submitting the returns to headquarters for that year, in the hope that the following year's profit would make good the loss. A distorted version of the situation reached the authorities, and he was summoned to Kathmandu to explain. He was frightened, but resolved to tell the truth. Before setting out for Nepal he came to Dakshineswar and related everything to the Master. Sri Ramakrishna said, "You have not stolen the timber. Put the real facts before the authorities, and they cannot but pardon you. Don't be afraid, the Mother will protect you." Viswanath felt greatly relieved by this assurance and cheerfully started on his journey. His frank avowal of the circumstances pleased the Durbar, who promoted him to the rank of Colonel, and sent him back to Calcutta as Ambassador.

The Master still lived on a high spiritual level, plunging into Samadhi every now and then, sometimes remaining there for three days at a time. Bishwanath understood the Master's lofty spiritual moods and came to look upon him as his Guru. One day he said to a friend, "I have read the Vedas and other scriptures, I have also met a good many monks and devotees in different places, but it is in Sri Ramakrishna's presence that all my desires have been fulfilled. To me he seems to be the embodiment of the truths of the scriptures. You, too, I am sure, will experience this in time."

KESHAB CHANDRA SEN AND THE BRAHMO SAMAJ

In March, 1875—about a year before his mother's passing—an important event took place in the life of Sri Ramakrishna, which was destined to produce far-reaching results. It was his meeting with the celebrated Brahmo leader and preacher, Keshab Chandra Sen, undeniably the greatest figure of the Brahmo movement of the time. A great scholar and eloquent orator of an exceedingly religious turn of mind, Keshab from a lieutenant to Maharshi Devendra Nath Tagore advanced to the leadership of the forward section of the Brahmos and founded the Bharatvarshiya Brahmo Samaj. His character and attainments made him the idol of a large number of ardent truth-seekers, and his influence on the educated youths of the day was great. Hearing of his piety, Sri Ramakrishna wished to meet him. He had seen him meditating long ago at the Adi-Brahmo Samaj, and had remarked that of all the boys there he was the only one whose meditation was successful. He also had a vision of him in Samadhi in which he saw a peacock with a ruby in its head, spreading its tail. The unfurled tail, as he said afterwards, signified Keshab's followers, and the ruby his Rajasika nature. Keshab was at this time staying with some of his followers in the garden-house of Jaygopal Sen at Belgharia, a couple of miles from Dakshineswar. One afternoon Sri Ramakrishna accompanied by Hriday went in Captain Vishwanath's carriage to see him. Hriday went in first to announce his uncle's arrival. Hearing that a great devotee had come to talk with him on spiritual matters, Keshab asked Hriday to show him in. Sri Ramakrishna was plainly dressed in a Dhoti with a red border, one end of which was thrown across his left shoulder. Keshab and the other Brahmos at first found nothing remarkable about him. Finally Sri Ramakrishna said, "I hear that you have seen God, so I have come here to hear about it." The ensuing conversation held Keshab and his followers under its spell. Sri Ramakrishna then sang a song of Kali the Mother, with his usual fervour, in the course of which he fell into Samadhi.

Keshab and the others were not much impressed by this trance, as such states were unfamiliar to them. But when they saw Hriday recall his uncle to ordinary consciousness by chanting the sacred Om in the ears, they were amazed. Sri Ramakrishna's face was beaming with a divine radiance. A torrent of inspiring words followed, which went straight to the hearts of the listeners. He spoke of the innumerable manifestations of one and the same infinite God, illustrating it by the following parables:

"Some blind men happened to come across an elephant. Someone told them what it was and asked them to describe it as it seemed to them. The one who touched the leg said, 'The elephant is like a column.' The second one said, 'The elephant is like a winnowing fan.' He had felt one of its ears. Similarly, those who had touched its trunk or belly, gave different opinions. So with God, everyone conceives Him according to his experience.

"A man who had seen a chameleon under a tree returned and said, 'I have seen a beautiful red chameleon under the tree.' Another said, 'I was there before you. The chameleon is not red, but green. I have seen it with my own eyes.' A third said, 'I too know it well. I saw it before either of you, and it was neither red nor green, but—and I saw it with my own eyes—it was blue.' Others declared it was yellow, or grey, and so on. Soon they began to quarrel among themselves as to who was correct. A man passing by asked what the trouble was. When he was told he said, 'I live under that very tree, and I know the chameleon well. All of you are right, every one. The chameleon is sometimes green, sometimes blue, it is all colours by turn, and sometimes it is absolutely colourless'."

He ridiculed the attempt of the human mind to fathom the nature of God, by comparing it to an ant that desired to carry a whole sugar-hill in its mouth. It is God's grace, he said, that leads to realization. There was something in the manner of his speech that convinced Keshab that Sri Ramakrishna must have actually seen God. Stupefied and puzzled, Keshab Chandra, the high priest of the Brahmo cult, felt like a child before this man of realization and listened to him with the utmost reverence. He opened the doors of his heart, and every word uttered by the Master found a permanent niche there. At the end of the discourse the Master said to Keshab, "Your tail has

dropped." Finding that the audience did not understand him, he explained: "You must have seen tadpoles. So long as they have tails, they must live in water; but when they drop off they can live on land as well as in water. Similarly, so long as a man has his tail of nescience, he can live only in the pool of the world. But as soon as he loses his nescience, he can live in God or in the world just as he pleases. Your mind, Keshab, is in such a state now. You can live in the world, and enjoy divine bliss as well." After spending some delightful hours in this way, Sri Ramakrishna took his leave and returned to Dakshineswar.

Keshab was deeply attracted by Sri Ramakrishna. Desirous of knowing more of him, he sent some of his followers to Dakshineswar to watch Sri Ramakrishna and to report. He with some of his devotees visited the Master frequently, and long hours were spent in spiritual discussion. Gradually they became very intimate. Sri Ramakrishna sometimes visited Keshab in Calcutta, and every year on the anniversary of the Brahmo Samaj, Keshab with his party either visited Dakshineswar or invited Sri Ramakrishna to the Samaj. On many occasions Keshab came to Dakshineswar with his band of devotees in a special steamer, either to visit him at the temple or to take him out on the Ganga.

The profound influence of Western culture upon Keshab had not destroyed his love for and devotion to God. The wisdom culled from his contact with Sri Ramakrishna he was eager to share with others, and we find him expounding it in messages of hope and strength not only from the pulpit, but also in the columns of different newspapers, English and vernacular. One day, at Dakshineswar, Sri Ramakrishna explained to Keshab that Brahman and Its inscrutable Power were one and the same substance looked at from different standpoints—like fire and its burning property—both equally true. This Keshab understood. Then the Master told him that God, His devotee, and His words as embodied in the scriptures were also one and the same thing—which, too, Keshab admitted. But when Sri Ramakrishna said that the spiritual guide, the Lord, and the devotee were the same, Keshab could not follow him so far. So the Master dropped the subject, not wishing to disturb his mind by making him go too fast. Through contact

with Sri Ramakrishna Keshab gradually grasped more and more of the deeper truths of the Vedic religion, and undertook the requisite discipline to realize them.

Keshab had a sincere admiration for Sri Ramakrishna. Whenever he visited Dakshineswar he brought with him some offering in the way of fruits etc., which he reverently placed before the Master, and sitting at his feet like a humble disciple, drank in his words of wisdom. One day the Master said to him in fun, "Keshab, you charm people with your eloquence. Let me, too, hear something from you." Keshab modestly replied, "I must not be vending needles in a blacksmith's shop. Rather I should listen to you. It is your words repeated to people that are appreciated so much."

In the year 1878 Keshab married his daughter to the Maharaja of Cooch-Bihar, before she reached the age-limit of fourteen as laid down by himself in the laws of the Brahmo Samaj. This made a great stir in the Samaj, and a section of the Brahmos seceded from him and founded a new party called the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj. Sri Ramakrishna was sorry for this schism, and is said to have remarked, "Birth, death, and marriage are things that depend upon the will of God. Keshab make a mistake in trying to put hard and fast restrictions upon marriage." If anybody criticized Keshab for his action, the Master would defend him saying, "Why, what is there so very wrong in it? Keshab is a householder, and by his daughter's marriage he has but discharged the duties of a father, without offending religion." Keshab's reputation, however, suffered, and cut to the quick, he turned his mind inward and strove henceforth more earnestly for realization. This change in his attitude was reflected in the Samaj of which he was the head, Sri Ramakrishna helped him to dive deep into the profundities of the spiritual realm. Keshab recognized the need of external aids such as Homa, baptism, tonsure or wearing the ochre robe, and himself adopted some of them. He understood that great personages like Buddha, Sri Chaitanya, or Jesus were living eternally in spiritual forms, and every one represented a facet of the Eternal Truth, a channel for the same spiritual current. To realize their ideals in his own life, he took up one or other of these types and meditated on them for some time. Needless to say, Keshab's action was due to the fact that he knew Sri Ramakrishna had

gone through a similar process during his Sadhana period. For a couple of years he tried to assimilate the universal ideal of Sri Ramakrishna—that every religion was a path to God—and at the end of that time gave to the public his understanding of it, under the name of the Navavidhan (New Dispensation). Words fail to describe the reverence he felt for Sri Ramakrishna. If the Master came to the Brahmo Samaj while Keshab was conducting Services, he would stop his sermon and alight from the pulpit to greet him. At his home one day he showed Sri Ramakrishna all the places where he sat or dined or lay or studied, and requested him to bless them, so that they might always suggest holy thoughts to his mind. It is even said on reliable authority¹ that he took the Master to his meditation room and there worshipped him with flowers.

But Keshab, it must be said, could not assimilate Sri Ramakrishna's ideal *in toto*. For the New Dispensation which he preached was an *eclectic* religion, a collection of the best things from many religions, whereas Sri Ramakrishna's ideal was to allow everyone to follow his own bent—whatever it might be—sincerely and whole-heartedly, without interference.

It was not Keshab Chandra Sen alone, but the entire forward section of the Brahmo movement comprising the Navavidhan and the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj, that was profoundly influenced by coming in contact with Sri Ramakrishna. The members of both sections found him joining unreservedly in their prayers and songs, and naturally concluded that he was one of them. Having realized God in His different aspects, relative as well as Absolute, Sri Ramakrishna had not difficulty in guiding these devotees along their own lines, at the same time removing their prejudices so that they might concentrate their whole energy upon the search for God. Knowing that they would not be able to follow his teachings in their entirety, he told them to take as much as they could and reject the rest.

The Brahmo Samaj was much benefited by the influence of Sri Ramakrishna. He it was who instilled into the Brahmos the idea of the motherhood of God. Heretofore their prayers had consisted mainly in praising His many attributes. Sri Ramakrishna taught them to love God more intensely. "Why do you dwell so much upon the glories of God?" he said one day

¹ Pundit Vijay Krishna Goswami related it to Swami Saradananda.

addressing Keshab and some of his followers. "Does a son when with his father think of his father's possessions—his houses, gardens, horses, and cattle? On the contrary he thinks of his father's love. He knows that it is proper for a father to maintain his children and look out for their welfare. We are all children of God. So what is there to wonder at in His paternal care of us? The real devotee never thinks about these things. He looks upon God as his very own—his nearest and dearest—and says boldly, 'Thou must fulfil my desires—must reveal Thyself to me.' If you dwell so much upon His glories, you cannot think of Him as your own, nor can you feel intimate with Him. You are awed by His majesty. He is no longer near. No, no, you must think of Him as your nearest and dearest. Then only can you realize Him."

The Brahmos gained a broader and more comprehensive idea about God from the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna. He would say to them, "None can limit God by saying that he has known all about Him. He has form, and again He is without form. Who knows how many aspects He has!" To those who thought that God could not have form, that it was a sin to worship Him through any image or symbol, Sri Ramakrishna would say, "It is true that water is without form. But when it is frozen into ice it has a definite form. Similarly the formless Brahman assumes various forms under the influence of an aspirant's devotion. As a toy apple suggests to one the real apple, or a photograph reminds one of one's absent father, so images or symbols help the devotee to the vision of God as He really is."

The Brahmos began to understand that there was much significance behind the image-worship—a practice which they used to call idolatry. From Sri Ramakrishna they learnt that Brahman and Its manifestation are inseparable. Being correlated ideas, each presupposes the other. They realized that a man fell into the same error by saying that God is formless only, as the man who tries to confine Him to a particular image or symbol. Any conception of God, taken singly, represents only one of His aspects. In reality, God is immanent in the universe in His aspect with form; without form, but still endowed with attributes, He is called the Ishvara, the Creator, Preserver and Destroyer of the universe; and as the Transcendent Reality,

the Absolute, without forms or attributes, He is the substratum of all that is finite, of everything that is conceivable, including even the idea of the Ishvara. It is clear to any one who thinks at all that such comprehensive understanding of the Truth will eventually reconcile all sects and denominations.

Pratap Chandra Majumdar, Keshab's associate, summed up the wonderful versatility of Sri Ramakrishna's character in an illuminating article contributed to the *Theistic Quarterly Review*. He wrote: "What is his religion? It is orthodox Hinduism, but Hinduism of a strange type. Ramakrishna Paramahansa (for that is the name of this saint) is the worshipper of no particular Hindu god. He is not a Shaiva, he is not a Shakta, he is not a Vaishnava, he is not a Vedantist. Yet he is *all these*. He worships Shiva, he worships Kali, he worships Rama, he worships Krishna, and is a confirmed advocate of Vedantic doctrines. . . . He is an idolater, yet is a faithful and most devoted meditator of the perfections of the one formless, infinite Deity whom he terms Akhanda Sachchidananda (Indivisible Existence-Knowledge-Bliss). To him each of these deities is a force, an incarnated principle tending to reveal the supreme relation of the soul to that eternal and formless Being who is unchangeable in His blessedness and light of wisdom. . . . These incarnations, he says, are but the forces (Shakti) and dispensations (Lila) of the eternally wise and blessed Akhanda Sachchidananda who can never be changed or formulated, who is one endless and everlasting ocean of light, truth and joy So long as he is spared to us, gladly shall we sit at his feet to learn from him the sublime precepts of purity, unworldliness, spirituality and inebriation in the love of God." The same writer states in another article, "He by his childlike Bhakti, by his strong conceptions of an ever-ready motherhood, helped to unfold it (God as our Mother) in our minds wonderfully By associating with him we learnt to realize better the Divine attributes as scattered over the 330 millions of deities of mythological India, the gods of the Puranas." This testimony goes to show how Sri Ramakrishna revolutionized in many respects the spiritual outlook of the Brahmos.

Another great man of the Brahmo Samaj who was attracted by the magnetic personality of Sri Ramakrishna was Pundit Vijay Krishna Goswami. He was descended from the great

Advaita Acharya, one of the foremost figures of Sri Chaitanya's group. Brought up in orthodox surroundings, Vijay early developed a passion for truth and the spiritual life. Like many other truth-seekers of his day, he came in contact with Maharshi Devendra Nath Tagore and more particularly with Keshab Chandra Sen, by whom he was profoundly influenced. For the sake of truth he cut himself off from his relatives and the insignia and privileges of a Brahmin to become a staunch supporter of Keshab and his Brahmo Samaj. But after the Cooch-Bihar marriage he seceded from Keshab. He burned with a passion to realize God, and when he came in contact with Sri Ramakrishna he was deeply impressed by his saintliness. They soon became friends. As the Master wished to see him often, he visited Dakshineswar whenever he had leisure. This association with Sri Ramakrishna had the effect of intensifying his yearning for God. In the course of his devotional exercises he had various experiences, which restored his faith in the different forms of the Deity, which, under the Brahmo influence, he had regarded as superstitions. His reverence for Sri Ramakrishna was unbounded, and he openly acknowledged his deep indebtedness to him. Sometimes, though separated from the Master by hundreds of miles, he was blessed with extraordinary visions of him.

Though Keshab and Vijay became heads of rival parties, Sri Ramakrishna looked upon them and their parties with the same tenderness and love. He was sorely grieved at the misunderstanding between them and tried to effect a reconciliation.

Finding that his views no longer coincided with those of the Brahmo Samaj, Vijay severed his connection with it, and pursued in solitude a course of independent spiritual practice.

Pundit Shivanath Shastri took his place. He, too, had the good fortune of coming in contact with Sri Ramakrishna, about whom he has left some personal reminiscences in his book entitled *Men I have seen*. It was in the year 1875, while engaged as the Head Master of a Calcutta school, that he first saw the Master at Dakshineswar. "I am so delighted to meet you," said Sri Ramakrishna, "won't you come to see me now and then?" Shivanath was much struck with his simplicity and devotion, and after many visits their relationship became very close. Shivanath was amazed to find that the Master had trans-

lated into action his great injunction as to the avoidance of lust and wealth.¹ "I was present", he writes,² "on occasions when coins were placed in his hand by an enquiring visitor, as an experiment. The saint would go into one of his usual trances, and would remain unconscious until they were removed." Shivanath's religion did not require a man to renounce the world altogether. It sought to reconcile the world and God. So it was difficult for him to understand the full significance of Sri Ramakrishna's life of unimpeachable purity and renunciation of lust. He writes, "Ramakrishna was practically separated from his wife, who lived in her village home. One day when I was complaining to some friends about the virtual widowhood of his wife, he drew me to one side and whispered in my ear, 'Why do you complain? It is no longer possible, it is all dead and gone.' Another time as I was inveighing against this part of his teachings, and also declaring that our programme of work in the Brahmo Samaj includes women, that ours is a social and domestic religion, and that we want to give education and social liberty to women, the saint became very much excited, as it was his fashion when anything against his settled conviction was asserted—a trait we so much liked in him—and exclaimed, 'Go, thou fool, go and perish in the pit that your women will dig for you.' Then he glared at me and said, 'What does a gardener do with a young plant? Does he not surround it with a fence, to protect it from goats and cattle? And when the young plant has grown up into a tree and it can no longer be injured by cattle, does he not remove the fence and let the tree grow freely?' I replied, 'Yes, that is the custom with gardeners.' Then he remarked, 'Do the same in your spiritual life; shun women in the beginning of that life; become strong, be full-grown, then you may seek them.' To which I replied, 'I don't agree with you in thinking that women's work is like that of cattle, destructive; they are our associates and helpers in all our spirit-

¹ To avoid any possible misconception, a word of explanation is necessary with regard to Sri Ramakrishna's favorite expression, "Kamini-Kanchana", meaning literally woman and gold. Needless to say, he used it in a general sense, meaning sex attraction and wealth. The use of the word "Kamini" does not imply any hatred for women. He used it because he was addressing men. When addressing women, he always substituted the word "Purusha" or "man", showing clearly that he meant the sex-instinct. Sometimes he actually used the more comprehensive phrase "Kama-Kanchana", i.e. "lust and gold".

² For want of space the quotation that follows has been condensed.

ual struggles and social progress'—a view with which he could not agree, and he marked his dissent by shaking his head. Then referring to the closing time he jocularly remarked, 'It is time for you to depart; take care, do not be late, otherwise *your woman* will not admit you into her room.' This evoked hearty laughter."

In his reminiscences Pundit Shivanath speaks in glowing terms of Sri Ramakrishna's love for him. On many occasions the Master clasped him to his bosom and requested him again and again to come to Dakshineswar. Once when he failed to come after repeated invitations, the Master went to see him. Such was his intense love for all who tried to lead a religious life. But in spite of his close intimacy, Pundit Shivanath had a strange idea about the Master's transcendental state or loss of outward consciousness in Samadhi. He saw in it only the outcome of "a strange nervous disorder, under which, whenever there was any strong emotion or excitement, he would faint, losing consciousness for the time being, while his whole countenance assumed a radiant glow, as a sign of the emotion working within." He heard about Sri Ramakrishna's great austerities, specially as regards food and sleep, and, therefore, concluded that his trances were but the after-effect of the austere life he had led during his youth. Nevertheless, he classified these "fits" of Sri Ramakrishna with those of Chaitanya, Mohammed, and many other saints of a devotional temperament. Sri Ramakrishna heard of Shivanath's views, and seeing him one day at Dakshineswar said to him, "Well Shivanath, I hear that you call my Samadhi a disease and say that I become unconscious at that time. You think day and night of all sorts of material things and yet consider yourself to be of sound brain, while I who meditate on the Eternal Fountain-head of Consciousness appear to you as deranged! A fine piece of reasoning!" Shivanath had nothing to say. Thinking that too great intimacy with Sri Ramakrishna was responsible for the spiritual revolution in the mind of Vijay which made him leave the Brahmo Samaj, Shivanath was anxious to ward off this unwholesome influence, as he thought it to be, from his Samaj. Asked why he no longer frequented the Kali temple at Dakshineswar, he replied that if he did so, other members of his Samaj would follow his example, and as a result the organization would collapse.

One outstanding feature of Sri Ramakrishna's character was his extreme simplicity and utter abhorrence of show. He was the Mother's child—an instrument upon which the Divine Mother was playing. Except in exalted moods when he lost his own individuality in the absorbing personality of the Mother, he could not bear to hear himself praised. Another point of importance in connection with him was that he was, literally, all things to all men. Those closely associated with him knew of hundreds of instances where he suited his conversation to the mentality of the person addressed. For instance, he never spoke of Jnana to a Bhakta. If he were discoursing on the unreality of life with a Jnani, and a Bhakta happened to come in, he would change the subject at once and speak of the world as being real, the manifestation of the Lord ! For he knew that while the Jnani would not object to the interpretation of the world from the standpoint of Bhakti, the devotee might be shocked to hear that the universe was unreal. His one idea was to help everyone towards the goal without disturbing his or her particular line of thought. This endeared him to all ; everyone saw in him the fulfilment of his own mode of Sadhana, and he was in reality the consummation of them all. The following quotation from Shivanath's book illustrates the point. "I was seated with him," he writes, "when a number of rich men from Calcutta arrived. The saint, in the midst of the conversation, went out of the room for some minutes. In the meantime Hriday, his nephew and care-taker, began to extol his uncle before these men, narrating some of his great performances. Referring to the . . . period of his greatest fervour, he said, 'So great was his love of God, that he became insensible to all outward circumstances of life, apparently dead to all external events, for some time.' Just at that moment Sri Ramakrishna entered the room. He heard Hriday's last words, and took him to task for trying to magnify him before others. The words I remember vividly, 'What a mean-spirited fellow you must be to extol me thus before these rich men ! You have seen their costly apparel and their gold watches and chains, and your object is to extract from them as much money as you can. What do I care what they think of me ?' Then turning to the men he said, 'No, my friends, what he has told you about me is not true, it was not love of God that made me absorbed and indif-

ferent to external life ; I became positively insane for some time. The Sadhus who frequented this temple told me to practise many things. I tried to follow them, and the consequence was my austerities drove me to insanity." Pundit Shivanath took these words literally and so failed to understand their real import.

But he had sincere respect for the Master. He writes, "I have seldom come across any other man in whom the hunger and thirst for spiritual life was so great and who had passed through so many privations and sufferings in the religious practices. . . . I was convinced that he was no longer a Sadhaka or a devotee under exercise, but was a Siddha Purusha or one who had attained direct vision of spiritual truth. . . . My acquaintance with him, though short, strengthened many a spiritual thought in me. I owe him a debt of gratitude for the sincere affection he bore me. He was certainly one of the most remarkable personalities I have come across in life."

Another leading Brahmo who profited by contact with Sri Ramakrishna was Trailokya Nath Sanyal, the famous singer and composer of Keshab's Samaj, better known under the pseudonym of Chiranjib Sharma. He was deeply attracted by the Master, who loved him too. Trailokya's emotions at seeing the Master so often in the superconscious state gave him themes for many devotional songs, which later touched thousands of hearts in Bengal.

Amusing situations arose now and then. We give here an instance, though the incident happened some years later. Trailokya Nath wrote a life of Keshab, in which he said that Sri Ramakrishna, after his contact with Keshab, modified his views about the householder's life ; that he admitted it was possible to attain spirituality even by living in the world. The devotees of the Master—of whom there were a number by this time—wanted this point cleared up. One day Trailokya met the Master at the house of Baharam Bose (we shall hear of him later on) in Calcutta, and Girish Chandra Ghose, the actor-dramatist, raised the topic.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Trailokya and others): "To one who has attained the bliss of God, the world tastes as without salt. One who has a costly shawl cares no longer for piece of broad-cloth."

Trailokya: "I am talking only of householders, not monks."

Sri Ramakrishna: "What is all that you are saying? Those who advocate practising religion while leading the worldly life, if they once taste the bliss of God, lose their relish for the world. All their enthusiasm for work vanishes. Gradually, as the bliss becomes more and more intense, they cannot work, and they seek that bliss alone. Can the pleasures of the senses compare with the bliss of God? Once a man tastes it, he runs wildly after it. Then who cares about the world?"

"There may be innumerable lakes and rivers and seas full of water, but the chatak¹ won't drink that water, though it be dying of thirst. It would be waiting for a drop of rain under the constellation of Swati. 'All other water is like dust to it.'

"They talk of harmonizing religion and enjoyment! When a man drinks just a little, he may see things in their proper order. But he can't do so if he is dead drunk.

"When a man tastes of the bliss of God, no other pleasure appeals to him. Then talk of lust and wealth is galling. The man becomes mad for God, and has no liking for money, etc."

Trailokya: "If a man lives in the world, he must accumulate some money. He has to practise charity—"

Sri Ramakrishna: "What! First accumulation of money and then God! And how great is their charity and kindness! They spend thousands of rupees in the marriage of their daughters, but the next-door neighbour with his family may be starving, and they feel constraint in giving him a handful of rice—they have to think long before doing so! While people are starving, they think, 'Never mind, whether neighbours live or die, it is of little consequence to me; let me and my family live well.' And they talk of kindness to all beings!"

Trailokya: "Among householders also there are good men. Pundarika Vidyanidhi, the follower of Sri Chaitanya, was a householder."

Sri Ramakrishna: "He had drunk the bliss of God up to his neck. Had he drunk a little more, he could not have lived a householder's life."

Trailokya kept silent.

Girish: "Then what you have written in your book is wrong?"

¹ An Indian bird.

Trailokya: "Why, doesn't he admit that a man may be religious even while in the world?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "He may, but he must live in it after the attainment of knowledge, after the realization of God. Then he remains unaffected by the evils of the world."

Girish then broached the topic of Divine Incarnation.

Trailokya: "God is incarnated in His devotees alone. The Infinite Power is not and cannot be manifested through man, however, great he may be."

Girish: "You worship children as Brahmagopala—God in the form of boys—and can you not worship a saint as God?"

Sri Ramakrishna (to Trailokya): "Why do you bring in the Infinite? If I have to touch you, must I touch your whole body? If I want to bathe in the Ganga, must I touch the whole river from Hardwar up to Sagar Island? So long as there is the 'I', there is duality. The Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute is an ocean, within which is the pitcher of 'I'. So long as there is the pitcher, the water seems to be separate—one portion is inside the pitcher and the other outside. When the pitcher breaks, there is one mass of water; and that cannot be expressed in words. Who will do so?"

The Master then spoke personally with Trailokya. He said, "Why, you are already having the bliss of God, aren't you?"

Trailokya: "No, sir. As soon as I go away, I shall be just as I was before. Now I am in a fine mood."

Sri Ramakrishna: "If one has shoes on, one need not be afraid of thorns. If one has the conviction that God alone is real and all else is unreal, one need not dread the influence of lust and wealth."

When Trailokya left, the Master said to Girish and others, "Do you know what they are like? A frog was born in a well. It never saw the earth. So it would not believe that there was such a thing as the earth! They have had no taste of the bliss of God, and so they are talking of the 'world' and so on.

(To Girish): "Why do you waste your breath in arguing with them? They are going in for both world and God. Unless they have actual experience of divine bliss, they cannot understand it. It doesn't matter. They are not to blame. Everyone cannot comprehend the Absolute. Only a dozen Rishis appreciated Ramachandra. All cannot grasp Him. Some take

Him for an ordinary man and some for a saint, while just a few know Him as an Incarnation.

"People make offers according to their capital. A gentleman said to his servant, 'Take this diamond to the market and let me know what prices are offered for it. First take it to the brinjal-seller.' The servant did so. The brinjal-seller turned the diamond over in his hand and said, 'I will give you nine seers of brinjal for it.' The servant said, 'Brother, go just a little higher—offer ten seers.' The man replied, 'No, I have offered more than the market rate. If you agree, all right.' The servant smiled, and taking the diamond returned to his master and made his report. The gentleman said, 'Very well. Now go to the cloth-dealer. The other man deals only in brinjals, so what can he know about diamonds? The cloth-dealer has more capital, and I should like to know what he says on the matter.' The servant went to the cloth-dealer and said, 'What will you give for this?' The man said, 'It is good stone and can be made into a fine ornament. I will give you nine hundred rupees for it.' The servant said, 'Can't you give a little more—say a thousand?' The cloth-dealer said, 'Let us not discuss the matter further. I have already offered more than its market value. I cannot give you more than nine hundred.' The servant returned and narrated his experience to his master who said, 'Now go to the jeweller. Let us have his quotation.' The jeweller looked at it and said at once, 'I shall give you a hundred thousand for it!'

"They talk of leading a religious life while living as householders. But that is like a man sitting in a closed room, with just a ray of light peeping through an aperture in the roof. Can one see the sun if the roof be overhead? What good is one ray of light? Lust and wealth are the roof. Can one see the sun without removing the roof? Worldly people are imprisoned, so to say, in the room.

"The Avataras and persons of their stamp are a divine group. They roam in the open air. They are never caught in the world—never imprisoned. Their ego is not dense like that of worldly people. The ego of the latter is like a walled enclosure with a roof—nothing outside can be seen. The ego of the Avatara is a thin one, through which God is constantly visible. Suppose a man is standing by a wall, on both sides of which

are endless stretches of open space. If there be a hole in the wall, that man can see the other side also ; and if the hole be large enough, he can pass and repass through it. The ego of the Avatara may be likened to that wall with a very large hole in it. From either side of the wall the Avatara has a view of the endless stretch of open space on the other side. That is to say, even though they are incarnated in flesh, they are always in Yoga. Again, whenever they wish, they may go to the other side to become merged in Samadhi. If the hole be large enough, they can pass and repass through it—they can come down to the sense plane from the state of Samadhi."

Sri Ramakrishna's contact with the members of the Brahmo Samaj gave him the first opportunity to study the mentality of the educated community of Bengal from which later came the chief instruments for the propagation of his ideas. Born and brought up in a rural atmosphere, and passing his youth in a series of stormy Sadhanas, he had had no opportunity of coming in contact with the educated middle-class, the pioneers of every progressive movement in the country. He knew little of the steadily growing influence of the West upon the minds of the people. His own life was not touched by it. He realized the goal of life by following the ancient Hindu methods. He was a Hindu of Hindus—to him renunciation was the first and last word in religion. In this he admitted no compromise. It was the Brahmos who first gave him an idea of the way the wind was blowing. He saw that they were more influenced by the philosophers of the West than by the seers and prophets of India. Hence they found the greatest difficulty in accepting wholly the ancient truths of the Hindu religion, even though his own life vividly illustrated them. They had made a strange mixture of God and the world, which he found it difficult to dislodge from their minds. He was not at all dismayed by this state of things. Behind this, too, he saw the hand of God. So, with undiminished love he told the Brahmos all about his realizations and gave out the essence of his teachings, such as the necessity of renunciation, the sincere pursuit of one's own course of discipline, faith in God, the performance of one's duties in the world without thought of results, and discrimination between right and wrong. Knowing their minds, he allowed them freedom to take as much or as little of his teach-

ings as they liked. He thought that would be enough under the circumstances. His eagerness to meet the Mother's children of renunciation who would grasp his teaching fully, increased a hundredfold after this experience.

VISITS TO KAMARPUKUR

Shortly after his meeting with Keshab Chandra Sen, Sri Ramakrishna saw a wonderful vision. There arose in his mind a desire to see Sri Chaitanya's Sankirtana procession, to know what it was like. One day as he was standing outside his room, he saw in a vision a large concourse of men proceeding from the direction of the Panchavati towards the main gate of the temple-garden and gradually disappearing behind the trees. He saw that Sri Chaitanya, with his two greatest companions, Nityananda and Advaita, was slowly advancing in the midst of that gathering, beside himself with divine fervour, while the vast multitude was also caught in the vortex of that tidal wave of spirituality. Some were dancing wildly, while others were stupefied with joy. The mad scene of some four centuries back was again enacted before the eyes of the Master. A few faces from amongst this congregation were clearly impressed upon his mind, and later on he identified them in some of his prominent disciples. This led him to conclude that these devotees must have belonged to Sri Chaitanya's group.

Some time after this, he went to Kamarpukur, for a short stay. While there, he paid a visit to several villages and joined in the Sankirtana which the Vaishnavas held. His ecstasy, resulting in frequent Samadhi during the chant, attracted the people; the news went abroad, and many other Sankirtana parties came to the scene. The place where the Master was staying was thronged to its utmost capacity with men and women, and day and night the Sankirtana went on. This is his own description of the incident: "When I was staying at Hriday's they took me to Shyambazar. Just before entering the village I had a vision of Sri Chaitanya, whence I understood that the people of the village were devotees of Chaitanya. The attraction of the Sankirtana was so great that for seven days and nights there was constant gathering of people. All the time one could hear music and dancing, and nothing else. People climbed on the top of walls and trees to watch the scene. I stopped at Natabar Goswami's house, where there was a similar gathering throughout the day and night. In the morning

I used to slip away to a weaver's home for a little respite, but there, too, the crowd soon found me out, and appeared with their tomtoms and cymbals. Again the same phenomenon ! We used to bathe and have our meals at three in the afternoon ! The report was noised abroad that there was a man who had died seven times during the day and who had come back to life as many times ! Lest I should have an apoplectic fit, Hriday used to drag me to an open field—but there also the same swarm of people, and the same noise of tomtoms and cymbals ! Hriday rebuked them saying, 'What do you mean by dogging us like this ? Have we never heard Sankirtanas before ?' From far-off villages people used to come and remain during the night also. It was there I understood what divine attraction was like. In the Lord's play on earth as an Incarnation the attraction is due to the influence of Yogamaya, the Lord's inscrutable Power, which throws a charm over the hearts of all !"

He used to relate other interesting experiences during this visit. "The local Goswamis (Vaishnava leaders)," he said, "came to quarrel with me. They thought we would claim a share of their dues. But they saw that I did not accept a single piece of cloth or even a piece of thread ! Some one had described me to them as a knower of Brahman. Hence they thought of testing me, and one of them put the question, 'Why has he no rosary about his neck and no denominational mark on the forehead ?' He was answered by one among themselves, 'They have automatically dropped off like the dry branches of a cocoanut palm !' "

With a characteristic candour he acknowledged the source of his familiar illustration, whenever he made use of it, and explained how it signified the spontaneous disappearance, on the dawning of Knowledge, of all appendages from the seeker after Truth.

Ridiculing foolish dogmatism, he said on more than one occasion, "At Shyambazar and adjoining villages there are families of weavers. Many of them are Vaishnavas, but how they talk ! They asked about me 'Which Vishnu does he accept ? The Vishnu who preserves the universe ? Oh, he is beneath our notice ! And which Shiva ?—Well, we believe in the Atmarama Shiva, the Atmarameshwara Shiva.' One of them suggested, 'Well, you better explain to him which Hari you worship.'

Whereupon another retorted, 'My friend, why drag us into the matter? Settle it yourself.' They were mere weavers by profession, and still they talked big!"

One or two incidents that happened during the Master's stay at Kamarpukur, either on this or on some previous or later occasion—for he visited his native village almost every year during the rain—deserve mention, since they bring out some of the prominent features of his character. Once he was suffering from indigestion and had to live upon liquids. One night, after taking his supper of milk and barley water he retired, as did the ladies of the house. Suddenly at dead of night he came out of his room with a staggering gait, and called out to the women, "Are you all asleep? Will you give me anything to eat?"

"Why? You have taken your cup of milk and barley water," replied one of the ladies.

"When did I do it? I have just returned from Dakshin-eswar," said the Master.

The ladies were puzzled. They realized that he was talking from another plane of consciousness. But what was to be done under the circumstances? There was nothing in the house they could offer him. One of them ventured to say, "There is nothing in the pantry except some parched rice. You may take a little of that. It won't hurt you." So saying she brought some and offered it to him, but like a petulant child he turned his face away and said that he did not care for it. They tried in vain to persuade him that any other kind of food would be injurious. Consequently they had no alternative but to purchase, at that unusual hour, a quantity of sweets, and the Master ate them all as well as the plate of parched rice. Everyone trembled to think what this heavy meal would do to him; but the next morning, to their great surprise and relief, they found Sri Ramakrishna better. The two pounds of sweets had cured him!

Another time, when he was staying at his father-in-law's house at Jayrambati, during the night he became extremely hungry. There had been a feast during the day, and almost everything had been consumed. The ladies were greatly concerned, for there was only some rice soaked in water left. Sri Ramakrishna ate all the rice, enough for at least three men! Evidently he was in an extraordinary mood, and that was why it did not affect him. How well did Sri Ramakrishna demon-

strate by these apparently insignificant acts that the human mind regulates the functions of the body to meet the demands of the situation !

We have already spoken of the fascination of his personality for people of both sexes. One day he was to go to Hriday's home, *via* Jayrambati. His constitution had become so delicate that he could not walk even a short distance ; so a palanquin was brought. Dressed in scarlet silk cloth, with a gold amulet on his arm, his lips crimson from betel, he was a picture of exquisite grace. A crowd had gathered to see him off. As he was about to enter the palanquin, he noticed the gathering and asked Hriday the reason for it. "Well," said Hriday, "you are going away, and they won't see you for some days. So they have come to have a parting look at you." "But they see me every day," said the Master, "what new feature has attracted them in such large numbers today ?" Hriday said, "The thing is, you look so handsome in this dress, and they have come to see you." Sri Ramakrishna was shocked to hear that people were attracted by his physical beauty. The very idea was repulsive to him. "What," he exclaimed, "people crowding to see a man ! I won't go. Wherever I may go, people will crowd like this." He returned to his room and took off the robe in utter disgust. In spite of the entreaties of Hriday and others, he would not go out that day. His aversion to material things, including personal beauty, can be seen from this simple anecdote.

After a few months' stay at Kamarpukur Sri Ramakrishna returned to Dakshineswar. Among the many visitors who came there was a rich Marwari gentleman named Lakshmi Narayan, who held him in great esteem. One day he noticed a soiled coverlet on the Master's bed and at once offered to deposit in the bank in his name a sum of ten thousand rupees, so that his needs might always be supplied. The proposal was so painful to Sri Ramakrishna that he besought him with folded hands never to mention the subject again. Finding all his importunities futile, the Marwari next approached Hriday and pressed him to accept the money in the name of the Holy Mother, who would thereby be enabled to look to the Master's comforts. When this was made known to the Master, he again objected, saying that even in that case the money would practically be his, and he could not bear the idea of having any possessions.

The generous man still insisted. Finding argument of no avail, Sri Ramakrishna cried out in anguish, "O mother, why dost Thou bring such people here, who want to estrange me from Thee?" At this pathetic appeal the Marwari desisted. Referring to this incident the Master afterwards remarked, "At the offers of Mathur and Lakshmi Narayan I felt as if somebody were sawing through my skull!"

The following incident illustrates how repugnant the idea of planning things for the future was to him. For some days he noticed Hriday busying himself with a calf—tying it here, moving it about, and so on. Being curious, he asked Hriday what he was going to do with the calf. "Why," answered Hriday, "I shall take it home. In a few years it will grow into a fine animal for the plough." No sooner did the Master hear it than he fell into a swoon. Recovering from it after a long time he exclaimed, "Just look at the spirit of hoarding in worldly people! Now it is but a calf; it will grow big, and then help to till the fields! They plan so far ahead, and do not lean upon God! Ah, this Maya!" He likened the shock he felt on this occasion to a blow on the head.

At this time there arose a tremendous longing in his mind to meet his devotees—the pure souls whom the Mother had already shown him in spiritual forms during his transcendent visions. The time had come to train the instruments that were to give his message to the world; and he was burning with desire to pass on his realizations to the favoured children of the Mother. About this he would say later, "There was no limit to the yearning I had then. During the day-time I managed somehow to control it. The secular talk of the worldly-minded was galling to me, and I would look forward wistfully to the day that my beloved companions would come. I hoped to find solace in conversing with them and unburdening my mind in telling them of my realizations. Every little incident would remind me of them, and thoughts of them wholly engrossed my mind. I was already arranging in my mind what I should say to one and give to another, and so on. But when the day came to a close, I could not curb my feelings. The thought that another day had gone and they had not come, oppressed me! When during the evening service the temple rang with the sound of bells and conch-shells, I would climb to the roof of the

building in the garden, and writhing in anguish of heart cry at the top of my voice, 'Come my boys ! Oh, where are you ! I cannot bear to live without you !' A mother never longs so intensely for the sight of her child, nor a friend for his companion, nor a lover for his sweetheart, as I did for them ! Oh, it was indescribable. Shortly after this yearning the devotees began to come in."

RAMCHANDRA DATTA AND MANOMOHAN MITRA

The first two persons who responded to the call of Sri Ramakrishna were Ramchandra Datta and Manomohan Mitra, who were cousins and lived in Calcutta. The former was a medical practitioner and held a post in the Calcutta Medical College. Like the average educated man of his time, he was practically an atheist. Regarding himself he writes in his *Life of Sri Ramakrishna*: "In those days we did not believe in God, Nature being considered sufficient to explain the universe. We were rank materialists and held creature comforts to be the *summum bonum* of life." But he suffered from a great restlessness of mind, which he could not control. At this time he came across a copy of a newspaper conducted by Keshab Chandra Sen. Therein he read about Sri Ramakrishna and decided to visit the saint with Manomohan. One afternoon in 1879, they arrived at Dakshineswar, and finding the door shut, tapped at it. It was opened by a man plainly dressed, who, contrary to their expectations, was as unlike a Sannyasin as could be. But a few seconds in his presence convinced them that he was the saint. From the very first Sri Ramakrishna treated them as his own. He inquired minutely about them and finally called out to Hriday, who was then suffering from fever, "Come Hriday, here is a physician. You can have your pulse examined by him." It was done. The two cousins spent the whole afternoon with the Master in spiritual discourse, and when they were about to take leave, Sri Ramakrishna gave them some Prasad. They touched his feet, and the Master affectionately asked them to come again. They were charmed at his kindness, for such cordiality and such sympathy at first sight they had never experienced before. Sri Ramakrishna's love seemed so new and so genuine to them, because it was selfless.

Being occupied during the week, they went to see Sri Ramakrishna on Sundays. From this time on their lives took a different turn. They tried to detach themselves from worldly thoughts, and Dakshineswar and Sri Ramakrishna were their absorbing topics. They felt a growing disgust for the world. Their relatives were alarmed when they found the cousins talking earnestly

about God. One day Manomohan was about to start for Dakshineswar, when his aunt tried to persuade him not to go. But the attraction of Sri Ramakrishna proved stronger, and Manomohan and Ramchandra went to Dakshineswar. They found Sri Ramakrishna rather depressed, seated on his bed. Asked why he was sad, he replied like a child, "A devotee likes to come here ; but his aunt does not like it and tries to dissuade him. It makes me sad to think he might yield to her importunities and stop coming." The words had an electrifying effect on Manomohan's mind. He vowed in his heart never to listen to any such voices in future, and wondered how the saint came to know of the incident. It was this genuine love of Sri Ramakrishna for his devotees and his earnest solicitude for their welfare that completely won their hearts and drove them, without any conscious effort on their part, on towards God. Another day Manomohan was starting for Dakshineswar, when his wife urged him to stay at home as their daughter was ill with fever. But he refused and went to Dakshineswar with a heavy heart, for his near and dear ones seemed to be standing in the way of his realizing God. Reaching Dakshineswar he found the Master morose, as on the previous occasion, and shedding tears. With anxious heart he asked the reason. The Master replied, "Ah my boy, a true devotee comes here every now and then. But this displeases his wife. I am grieved to think lest he should cease to come here, following his wife's advice." Manomohan was overpowered. From that day he surrendered himself completely at the feet of the Master, whose tears washed away the dross and impurities from the devotee's heart. Manomohan and Ram became greatly attracted to Sri Ramakrishna. Not being content with going themselves to see him, they induced their relatives and friends to go to Dakshineswar to be blessed by coming in contact with him. As we shall see, it is they who introduced to the Master his two foremost disciples, Narendranath and Rakhal.

By this time other devotees were visiting Sri Ramakrishna and every Sunday his small room was crowded. These devotees became acquainted with one another, and those who were practising religious exercises under the guidance of Sri Ramakrishna, formed themselves into a sort of spiritual brotherhood. The Master encouraged this fraternal feeling. Now and then

he would accept invitations to Calcutta to visit devotees, seeing to it that his other followers were invited as well. These meetings gradually took the shape of little festivals. There would be an arrangement for Sankirtana, and many happy hours were spent in listening to the Master's discourses. Afterwards the guests would be entertained with a dainty feast. Through these celebrations the people of the neighbourhood would learn of the Master, and many who could not go to Dakshineswar had a chance of meeting him in Calcutta.

One day, in response to the Master's proposal, Manomohan arranged for such a festival in his house. Keshab and his Brahmo followers were invited. It was an edifying scene. The devotees commenced a Sankirtana in which Sri Ramakrishna joined. Now and then he fell into Samadhi. The devotees wept or laughed as they were swayed by varying emotions. After the Sankirtana they sat with the Master, and the evening was spent in religious discussion. After supper the party dispersed.

Manomohan was proud of his devotion. One day, before a large audience, Sri Ramakrishna praised Suresh (one of the devotees) saying, "Look at Suresh ; his devotion is peerless." This offended Manomohan, who resolved not to come thenceforth to Dakshineswar. As he was a regular Sunday visitor, his absence was noticed by the Master. He asked Ramchandra about it ; the latter was not able to account for it, and Sri Ramakrishna told him to make inquiries and report. Ram found his cousin in good health and sent the news to Dakshineswar. The Master at once sent for Manomohan, but the summons was disregarded. "Be happy with your devotees, I am nobody there," Manomohan apostrophised himself. The more he thought over the matter, the angrier he became with Sri Ramakrishna. The Master sent him invitation after invitation, but Manomohan declined them all. In his stubborn determination to avoid Sri Ramakrishna's emissaries, he moved to Konnagar, a few miles from Calcutta, taking the train daily to his office. Curiously enough, he put all the blame on Sri Ramakrishna. But he had no peace. The more he tried to banish all thoughts of Sri Ramakrishna, the greater became his mental turmoil. It became impossible for him to attend to business. Try as he would, he could not fix his mind on his work ; it instinctively turned to Dakshineswar. In despair he was forced to acknowledge that

Sri Ramakrishna possessed his whole heart. One day, as he went to bathe in the Ganga, he remembered the words the Master had said in praise of its sanctity. Instantly there stood before his mind's eye the serene figure of Sri Ramakrishna, vivid as ever. He made a supreme effort to banish it from his mind. At that moment his eyes fell upon a country boat not far from him. He saw in it a familiar figure talking with someone and pointing towards him. The second person in the boat was no other than Sri Ramakrishna, with Niranjan. Manomohan gave a start. Niranjan said, "Why don't you come to Dakshineswar? Sri Ramakrishna is so anxious about you that he has come to see you." It was a hot day, and Sri Ramakrishna was fanning himself. As he approached Manomohan, he fell into a trance. Manomohan mutely watched the scene, as the tears rolled from his eyes. "Ah, he has taken so much trouble for my sake! How greatly I must have wronged him!" he thought. Overwhelmed with emotion, he was about to fall, when Niranjan jumped from the boat and caught him. By this time Sri Ramakrishna had regained normal consciousness and asked Niranjan to bring Manomohan on board. Then he tenderly said, "Manomohan, I have been very anxious about you, and I have come for you." Manomohan prostrated himself before him and said, "Sir, it was, all due to my wounded vanity." He could say no more, and sobbed like a child. Sri Ramakrishna again plunged into Samadhi as the boat made its way towards Dakshineswar.

We have already referred to the atheistic views of Ramchandra Datta. His contact with Sri Ramakrishna gradually changed this attitude of mind. One day he frankly asked the Master if God really existed. "Doubtless," was the reply, "God really exists. You don't see any stars in the day, but that does not mean that the stars do not exist. There is butter in the milk. But can anybody know it merely by sight? To have the butter you must churn the milk in a cool place. Similarly you can't realize God by a mere wish. You must go through certain mental discipline." Ram was unable to take these words literally. Sri Ramakrishna read his mind and said with a smile, "God is certainly realizable. Look at the objects of His creation—they are so beautiful and tangible. He cannot be an object of mere speculation." "Yes," replied Ram, "but can I realize Him in this very life?" "You get what you desire," said the Master

after a moment's pause, "faith alone is the keynote to success." After singing a song he added, "You see, if you advance towards the east by ten steps, you shall leave behind the west by so much." "But one must have tangible proof," argued Ram. The Master replied with a smile, "A typhoid patient wants to have gallons of water and heaps of rice. But the doctor pays no heed to these entreaties, nor does he prescribe medicines at the patient's dictation. He knows what he is doing." But Ramchandra found no consolation in these words.

Shortly after, he became very restless for God. The pangs of separation were too much for him. One night he had a strange dream. He saw Sri Ramakrishna, who asked him to bathe and then pronounced in his ear a sacred Mantra, which he bade him repeat a certain number of times every day. He sat upright in bed in sheer joy. Next morning he hurried to Dakshineswar and told the Master of the dream. Sri Ramakrishna congratulated him on this piece of good luck. But Ramchandra made light of it considering it to be a figment of his fancy. His restlessness increased. In his perplexity he cursed the day he had met Sri Ramakrishna. He was between two stools—he found no pleasure in sense-enjoyments, yet he seemed as far from God as ever. A few days passed in this way. One morning at 11 o'clock, Ram and a friend of him were talking in the College Square, Calcutta, of their mental perplexities, when suddenly a man of dark complexion appeared before them and asked with a smile, "Why are you so anxious? Have patience." They were taken aback. Who might this man be, they thought, who had read their minds and bid them be of good cheer? They looked in all directions for the stranger, but he was gone. They were puzzled. It could not be an illusion, for both of them saw and heard him, in broad daylight. Ramchandra took this as a message from God. He related it to Sri Ramakrishna who said, "Yes, and many more things of this sort you shall see!"

For some time after this incident, Ramchandra felt great tranquillity of mind. He tasted the bliss which is the outcome of devotion. Wordly pleasures now appeared to him insipid, and he became more and more disgusted with them. One day he even prayed to the Master to be initiated into Sannyasa. Sri Ramakrishna dissuaded him saying, "Nothing should be done

on the spur of the moment. God alone knows what he means to do through a particular man. Where will your wife and children be if you leave the world? You must not try to upset the arrangement God has made for you. Everything will come in time." Ramchandra was convinced for the time being, but later brought the subject up again. Sri Ramakrishna said, "What will you gain by renouncing the world? The family life is like a fort. It is easier to fight the enemy from within the fort than from outside. You will be in a position to renounce the world when you can bestow three-fourths of your mind on God, but not before." Ramchandra was silenced.

Ramchandra came of a Vaishnava family. In studying the life of Sri Chaitanya he was struck by the wonderful similarity between him and Sri Ramakrishna. Once, at the request of the Master, he was spending the evening at Dakshineswar. They were alone. Suddenly the Master said, "What are you looking at?" "I am looking at you," replied Ramchandra. "What do you think of me?" asked the Master again. "I consider you to be Chaitanya," said Ram. "Well," said Sri Ramakrishna after a pause, "the Brahmani used to say the same thing." The remark seemed to Ram to be significant.

As the days went by, he saw more and more of Sri Ramakrishna's extraordinary clairvoyant power. One day, as he was coming with some sweets for the Master, a street-boy clamoured for a share. He gave him a bit, and after arriving at Dakshineswar put the basket in its usual place. Towards evening the Master felt hungry, and Ram offered the sweets to him. He touched them with his left hand, looked upward, shook his head as he broke some and replaced them, after which he washed his hands, to the mortification of Ram. When he came to Dakshineswar again, Sri Ramakrishna said, "When you bring anything for me, don't give any of it to anybody else. I cannot take anything without offering it to God, and I cannot offer anything to Him that has been defiled by being already offered elsewhere." Incidents such as these confirmed Ram's faith in the greatness of the Master.

After the lapse of some days Ramchandra was again tormented with great mental restlessness. The world appeared dreary to him. Again he came to the Master with his tale of woe. But this time Sri Ramakrishna cut him short with the curt

reply, "What can I do ? It all depends upon the will of God." Ramchandra was astonished and said, "How is this, sir ? All this time I have looked to you for help. Now what shall I do if you treat me like this ?" The Master simply said, "I don't owe you anything. If you like, you may come. If not, don't." Ramchandra would not have been more surprised if a bolt had fallen from the blue. He was completely unnerved. His first impulse was to put an end to his life by drowning himself in the Ganga. He left the room. The next moment he thought, "Why should I be such a fool as to commit suicide ? Let me try once more. Sri Ramakrishna said it was good luck to have initiation in dream. I shall test the efficacy of that Mantra today. They say that His name is even more powerful than He Himself." He lay on the verandah to the north of Sri Ramakrishna's room and began silently to repeat the Mantra. At dead of night Sri Ramakrishna opened the door leading to that verandah, and asking him to serve the Lord's devotees, returned to his room.

Ramchandra was a bit of a miser. So he managed to forget Sri Ramakrishna's injunction about the feeding of devotees. But the Master reminded him of it and even selected a day to go to his house. Ram reluctantly agreed, but the next day his heart opened, and he saw the infinite kindness of the Master in forcing him to give the invitation. He cheerfully made the preparations, and Sri Ramakrishna with his devotees spent the evening at his house.

The next evening Ram went to Dakshineswar. Sri Ramakrishna talked with him affably and instructed him till 10 o'clock. The night was very dark. Ram had taken his leave and was standing on the verandah, when he saw the Master coming towards him. Sri Ramakrishna drew near and said, "Well, what do you want ?" Ramchandra was puzzled. He felt that he was in the presence of a Power that could grant any boon. He did not know what to ask. Wealth, or even supernatural power, seemed insignificant. At length he decided to leave it to the Master. Choked with emotion he said, "Lord, I do not know what to ask of you. You decide for me." "Give me back the Mantra I gave you in dream," said Sri Ramakrishna, as he held out his hand and plunged into Samadhi. Ram offered the Mantra at his feet and prostrated himself before him. The

Master touched his head with his right toe. Ram could never tell how much time passed thus. The Master came back to normal consciousness and removed his foot. Ram stood up. "Look at me, if you wish to see anything," said the Master. The devotee looked and saw in him his Ishta, the adored object of his meditation. "You need not practise any more religious exercises," said Sri Ramakrishna, "come here every now and then, that is all. And when you come, bring with you a pice worth of something as a present."

SURENDRA AND KEDAR

Ramchandra had a friend named Surendra Nath Mitra who lived close to him. Surendra was an educated man and held an important post in an English firm, from which he drew considerable income. He was a typical young man of his day, Bohemian, and with no special bias towards religion, but he took pleasure in alleviating the sufferings of the poor and needy. It is said that one day a woman Sannyasin of imposing appearance accosted him in passing with these words, "My dear son, He alone is true and everything is false." This remark impressed him deeply. He went through a hell of mental agony which drove him almost to suicide in his struggles with his lower nature. Ramchandra invited him many times to go with him to Dakshineswar, but was always met with a refusal. At last he said, "All right, I shall go. But if your saint be a humbug, I shall pull him by the ears." He went to Dakshineswar and entered Sri Ramakrishna's room. The Master was talking with a number of devotees. Surendra took his seat without showing any mark of respect. He heard the Master saying to a devotee, "Why does a man behave like the young monkey and not like the kitten? The former clings to its mother, when she moves about, by its own effort. But the latter goes on mew-ing till the mother comes and takes hold of it by the neck. The young monkey sometimes misses its hold on its mother and is badly hurt. But the kitten runs no such risk. for the mother herself carries it from place to place. Such is the difference between self-effort and resignation to God." This parable was an eye-opener to Surendra. "Why," he thought, "I am behaving just like that young monkey, and that is the cause of my misery. From now on I will not go against the will of God, nor think of committing suicide if things do not turn out according to my wishes. I shall be satisfied with any condition the Blissful Mother chooses to place me in, and only call upon Her." The Master strengthened his remarks with another parable. Surendra heaved a sigh of relief at the lightness of his heart. He learned to take refuge at the lotus feet of the Mother and began to look upon himself as Her child. He felt a great access

of strength within him. Every word of the Master he treasured in his mind. When he was leaving, the Master said, "Don't forget to come again." Surendra was captivated and prostrated himself before Sri Ramakrishna. On his way home he remarked to his friends, "Ah, the tables have been turned. He has pulled me by the ears. How could I know that he was such a man, that he would read my inmost thoughts ! Now I feel that there is some meaning in life."

Thus at Surendra's very first meeting with the Master he was a changed man. He became deeply attached to Sri Ramakrishna and went to Dakshineswar almost every Sunday. All were amazed at his great yearning for God. The Master addressed him as Suresh, and it was the praise of his devotion which caused all Manomohan's heart-burning. One day Surendra heard the Master saying to a devotee, "A little manliness is necessary for everybody." Thereupon he thought, "But this is my disease, and Lord save me from it !" Sri Ramakrishna at once remarked, "I do not mean that struggle for pleasure which only debases a man and which even animals have. You must have the manliness of Arjuna—to stick to an ideal up to the last breath of your life."

Though by this time Surendra had become a great devotee of Sri Ramakrishna, he had not freed himself from past associations, and sometimes he was led to commit indiscretions, of which he was greatly ashamed. After such happenings, he tried to evade the Master. One Sunday he did not go to Dakshineswar, giving business as an excuse, and his friends reported to Sri Ramakrishna that he had again taken to bad company. The Master listened and calmly said, "He has still some desires. Let him enjoy a little while longer. He will become stainless ere long." These words reached Surendra. On the following Sunday he visited Sri Ramakrishna, but sat at a distance in a corner. The Master noticed it and tenderly invited him to come and sit near him. Then in a half-conscious state he said, "Well, when a man goes to an undesirable place, why doesn't he take the Divine Mother with him ? Then he can escape many an evil action." Surendra was a sensitive man and was much afraid lest Sri Ramakrishna should expose him. But the Master stopped there. The little that he had said, however, opened Surendra's eyes. He had tried so long to overcome his faults, and these

words of the Master showed him an easy way to conquer them. His devotion to Sri Ramakrishna deepened. One day he was working in his office, when he felt a sudden urge to go and see the Master. There was yet a good deal of work to do which he could not leave unfinished. But the desire to see the Master was too strong, and he hurried to Dakshineswar. On arriving there he found the Master preparing to go to Calcutta. Seeing him Sri Ramakrishna said, "It is good that you have come. I was anxious about you and was going to Calcutta to see you." Surendra was astonished. "How strange," he thought, "I was thinking of coming here, and he felt the desire to see me!" Then he humbly said, "If you were going out to see me, then please come to my house." Sri Ramakrishna agreed, and overjoyed Surendra took him to his home.

From this time Surendra was regarded as one of the inner circle of Sri Ramakrishna's devotees. He frequently invited the Master and his devotees to his house to hold those little festivals of which we have made mention, and it was at one of these that the Master met Narendra Nath for the first time. His purse was always open for Sri Ramakrishna's comfort. When devotees stayed with the Master at Dakshineswar, Surendra cheerfully bore their expenses also. The Master used to designate him as a Rasaddar in part, that is to say, he was commissioned by the Divine Mother to defray some part of Sri Ramakrishna's expenses.

One of Surendra's weak points was his love of drink, from which his friends tried their utmost to wean him. Ramchandra, in particular, pressed him again and again to give it up, not only because it was detrimental to his health, but because it cast a reflection upon the fair name of Sri Ramakrishna, whose devotee he had become. Surendra, who as a follower of Shakti did not look upon it as a great sin, finally said, "But why are you so insistent about it? The Master would certainly warn me if he considered it injurious to me. He knows all about it." "Well," said Ram, "let us go to him. He will surely ask you to give it up." "Agreed," said Surendra, "but you must not bring up the subject. Let him say so of his own accord, and I will give it up without fail." They went to Dakshineswar and bowed before the Master, who was sitting under the Bakul tree in an exalted state of mind. The Master

said, "Well, Suresh, why should you drink wine as wine? Offer it to Kali, and take it as Her Prasad. But see that you do not get intoxicated. Your gait must not falter, nor your thoughts wander. At first you will feel the ordinary excitement, but soon it will lead to spiritual felicity." The two friends were amazed. Surendra thenceforth followed this advice. Every evening he offered a little wine to the Goddess before drinking it. Curiously enough, it opened the flood-gates of his devotion. Like a child he cried plaintively for the Mother and talked only of God. Sometimes he sat still in deep meditation. Everybody was struck by his sincerity and devotion. The evil efforts of wine could not touch him.

He had a picture painted, showing the harmony of religions as conceived by Sri Ramakrishna. The prophets of all religions met there on a common platform. The mosque, the temple, and the church were depicted side by side. Sri Gauranga and Jesus danced together while holding hands! and Sri Ramakrishna pointed out to Keshab the synthesis of all faiths. Surendra sent a copy of it to Keshab, who acknowledged its receipt with the remark, "Blessed is the man who has conceived the idea."

Kedarnath Chatterjee was originally a Brahmo but subsequently tried many other paths. He was a man of devotional temperament and attracted attention by his tears when the name of God was mentioned. But he could find no solace in religious pursuits. He came to Dakshineswar and took refuge at the feet of Sri Ramakrishna. The Master was delighted to see his spiritual fervour and assigned to him a place among his householder devotees. Kedar generally lived at Dacca and preached the message of Sri Ramakrishna among the people there. It is said that the Master, weary of instructing devotees who were coming in ever-increasing numbers seeking his guidance, once prayed to Kali, "Mother, I cannot speak to so many people. Please empower Kedar, Girish, Ram, Vijay, and Mahendra to give them the preliminary instructions, so that just a little teaching from me will suffice." The Master, who respected everybody's sincere belief, often set devotees of different temperaments to argue with one another. Kedar was very good at repartee. One day, in a discussion about God, a devotee asked him how, if God was our kind father, he would explain why there was so much misery in creation. To this Kedar

replied, "Well, He did not invite me to the meeting where He decided the point." Sri Ramakrishna appreciated the reply, and often referred to it.

Kedar had within him the instincts of the Gopis of Vrindaban, and at sight of him Sri Ramakrishna would often fall into trance. The Master saw, however, that in spite of his devotion Kedar had some lingering attachment to worldly things. So he tried to fortify him against them. One day in a state of semi-consciousness he said to him, "You are still attached to lust and wealth. It is no use protesting that you are above them. Go forward. There are many more valuable things beyond the forest of sandal-wood—e.g. mines of silver, gold, and diamond, etc."

SOME INTERESTING WORTHIES

As the fame of Sri Ramakrishna spread, people in all stations of life began to be attracted towards him. Once some leading men of Calcutta came to the garden-house of Jadu Mallik at Dakshineswar to meet the Master. Among them was Maharaja Jatindra Mohan Tagore, who was well known for his wealth and charity. Being requested by the assembly to speak, the Master emphasised the need of renunciation and discrimination. He said, "You may repeat the name of God day and night, but if your mind be engrossed in the objects of the world, you won't gain anything thereby." Maharaja Jatindra Mohan is said to have remarked, "Sir, is it possible for worldly people to pray to God in right earnest? Even a pious soul like King Yudhishtira had to tell a lie." This irritated Sri Ramakrishna, who replied, "See, you have remembered that one act of Yudhishtira's life and forgotten his usual unflinching adherence to truth, his innumerable acts of kindness, and his high regard for the injunctions of the scriptures! Shame on you!"

Babu Kristodas Pal, editor of the *Hindu Patriot* and one of the pioneers of the national movement, respected alike by the Government and the public, also paid the Master a visit. The topic of renunciation came up, and Mr. Pal observed, "Sir, this cant of renunciation has almost ruined the country. For this reason the Indians are a subject nation today. Doing good to others, bringing education to the door of the ignorant and, above all, improving the material condition of the country--these should be our duty now. The cry of religion and renunciation would, on the contrary, only weaken us. You should advise the young men of Bengal to resort to such acts only as will uplift the country." "You appear to be a man of poor understanding," replied Sri Ramakrishna in an animated voice: "You dare to slight in these terms a thing which all our scriptures describe as the greatest of all virtues! By reading two pages of English you think that you know the world. You seem to think you are omniscient. Well, have you seen those tiny crabs just born in the Ganga when the rains set in? In this big universe you are more insignificant than even one of those little creatures. How

do you dare to talk of *helping* the world ? 'The Lord will look to it. You haven't got the power in you to do it.'" After a brief pause he resumed, "Can you explain to me how you can work for others ? I know what you mean by helping them. To feed a number of persons, to treat them when they are sick, to construct a road or excavate a well— isn't that all ? These are good deeds, no doubt, but how trifling in comparison with the vastness of the universe ! How far can a man advance in this line ? How many people can you save from famine ? Malaria has ruined a whole province. What could you do to stem its progress ? God alone can look after the world. Let a man first realize Him. Let him get the authority and be endowed with His power ; then and then alone he can think of doing good to others. A man should first be purged of all egoism. Then alone the Blissful Mother will ask him to work for the world."¹

Mahima Charan Chakravarty of Cossipore, Calcutta, was one of the earliest visitors to the Dakshineswar temple. He met the Master long before the coming of the disciples. Possessed of the desire to lead a religious life, he had at the same time an inordinate hankering for name and fame, which sometimes led him to resort even to untruth and prompted him to do things that made him ridiculous. He had a fondness for bombastic names. He founded a school which he called Prachya-Arya-Siksha-Kanda-Parishat ; his only son was named Mrigankamauli Putatundi ; he had a deer which he called Kapinjala ; and he would say that his spiritual guide was one named Agamacharya Damaruvallabha. Sometimes he claimed to have taken his initiation from Totapuri. In this connection he would say, "While making pilgrimages in Northern India I happened to meet him and accepted him as my Guru. Totapuri asked Sri Ramakrishna to follow the path of devotion, and he advised me to stick to the path of knowledge and to stay in the world." How far these assertions were true, was known only to him and to his Maker. He had a good library of English and Sanskrit books, which he pretended to have read. One day Narendra

¹ These words as applying to a *teacher* or leader of men draw a line of demarcation between work done with a sense of superiority and that done in the spirit of service. Not to *help* others but to *serve* them is the right standpoint. The ordinary man working from egotistic impulses is bound, but the man of realisation works without any risk, because he knows he is the Lord's instrument.

Nath¹ took a book from his shelf and found its pages had not been cut. On inquiry he was told that the first copy had been lent to a friend, and he had bought a second copy. Narendranath, however, found that most of his books had uncut pages ! Evidently they were kept for show.

At Dakshineswar, on special days, Mahima Charan, dressed in an ochre robe and Rudraksha beads, would sit in the Panchavati on a tiger skin, and with a one-stringed musical instrument pose as a great devotee. When he left for home, he would hang the skin on the wall of Sri Ramakrishna's room. The Master saw through him at a glance. In answer to a devotee's query about the skin, he said one day, "Mahim Chakravarty has left it there. Do you know why ? People will ask whose it is, and when I tell them they will think highly of the owner."

Mahima Charan used to recite from the Vedas and other sacred books, which pleased Sri Ramakrishna. The Master magnified even the slightest trace of spirituality in a Sadhaka, and so encouraged Mahima Charan in spite of his many shortcomings. As Mahima Charan was always discussing the Vedanta, the Master would try to help him to realize the conclusions of that philosophy. Knowing well that it would not be possible for him to give up the world, the Master would say, "What is the necessity of giving up the world altogether ? It is enough to give up the attachment to it. But one must practise religious discipline, for one has to fight the senses."

Mahima Charan attached too much importance to the study of the scriptures, and the Master would exclaim, "How long are you going to read the scriptures ? What do you gain by empty discussions ? First try to realize Him, and for this go through some spiritual exercises, putting your faith in the Guru. If you have no Guru, pray to God earnestly, and He will tell you what He is like. What will you learn from the mere study of books ? So long as you do not reach the market, you only hear a buzzing sound from a distance. But once there, you will find quite a different state of things. Then you will see and hear everything distinctly. After realization books, scriptures, and sciences appear like chaff."

A middle-aged man, named Pratap Chandra Hazra, coming

¹We shall hear more of him in a subsequent chapter.

from a village near Kamarpukur, lived for some years at the Dakshineswar temple. He had left his home on a momentary religious impulse, forsaking his aged mother and family, who had no one else to look after them. He was often seen telling beads, but being a little in debt, he entertained a secret desire that people attracted by his piety might help him to pay it off. Sri Ramakrishna detected this weakness and tried to correct him by saying that prayer must be free from any selfish motive. Though innocent of scriptural knowledge and realization, Hazra posed as a great authority on religion and boasted of an independent line of thought. He, therefore, did not pay much attention to Sri Ramakrishna's teaching, and often disturbed the minds of the Master's young disciples by ridiculing their attitude of devotion to God. He himself pretended to be a believer in the Advaita Vedanta and tried to impose that attitude upon others. For this the Master sometimes took him to task and sometimes reasoned with him about the need of different stand-points for different individuals. Disputation was his foible. So much was he given to it that Sri Ramakrishna often pointed to him as an example of barren argumentation. Disgusted with his vicious habit of poisoning others' mind with undigested philosophical tenets, the Master used to say that his presence in the Kali temple was to "thicken the plot" by adding complications. And yet Sri Ramakrishna did not withhold his love and sympathy from him. Hazra had a good friend in Narendranath, who liked to take part in his discussions notwithstanding the Master's poor opinion of him. It was Narendranath's kind intercession that extorted from Sri Ramakrishna the promise of Hazra's redemption at the time of death—a promise that was actually fulfilled.

One day the Master said to Hazra, "Don't eat too much. And give up your fastidiousness about cleanliness. Those who have this habit cannot attain to knowledge. Observe purity as much as necessary. But don't carry it to excess."

Another day he said, "What you are doing is good, but it is not done in the right way. Don't speak ill of anybody, not even of a worm. As you should pray to God for devotion, you should also pray that you may not speak ill of any one."

Hazra: "Will He hear my prayer?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes, a hundred times. He cannot but

do it if your prayer is sincere. Do people really weep for God as they do for their wife and children? The wife of a certain man at Kamarpukur was ill. He began to tremble apprehending that she might not recover—he was about to faint. Who feels the same way for God?"

Hazra took the dust of Sri Ramakrishna's feet as a token of regard.

Sri Ramakrishna (shrinking): "I don't like these things."

Hazra: "Shall I not touch the feet of one under whose care I am living?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Please God, and all shall be pleased. 'When He is pleased, the world is pleased.' Sri Krishna ate a tiny bit of food from Draupadi's pot and said, 'I am satisfied.' At once all beings were satisfied—they felt as if they had eaten their fill. But was it so when the sages took food? Was the universe satiated then?"

After praising natural love for God as opposed to formal devotion, the Master said to Hazra, "One day you were telling beads. I saw it and said to Mother, 'Mother, what a fool he is! Even here he is telling beads!' One who comes here gets illumination spontaneously, without any effort."

One day Sri Ramakrishna prayed to the Divine Mother, "Mother, if Hazra be a sham, please remove him." After a few days he left. The Mother removed him because he was trying to upset the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna, who was Her mouth-piece, and that could not be tolerated.

LATU, RAKHAL AND GOPAL SENIOR

"If you want to see the miraculous power of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna, look at the life of Latu. I have never seen the like of it before." Thus said Swami Vivekananda about Latu, an obscure boy born of humble parents in the District of Chapra in Bihar. He came to Calcutta in search of a job while he was quite young, and entered the service of Ramchandra Datta as a house-boy. A few days after, he went to Dakshineswar to see the Master, about whom he had just heard. Being a stranger to Calcutta and its suburbs, it was with some difficulty he found his way to the place where Sri Ramakrishna lived. As he approached, he saw a man in plain clothes pacing the verandah. He had pictured the saint as a monk dressed in ochre, but when he saw this man he forgot this idea entirely and prostrated himself at his feet. "Where do you come from?" asked Sri Ramakrishna. "From the house of Ramchandra Datta of Simla," was the reply. The Master received him kindly and conducted him to his own room, where he gave the boy some refreshments and talked with him on various subjects. Latu as yet did not know that this was the Paramahansa he had come to see, nor did he trouble himself much about it. He only knew that he felt a great joy in the presence of the man with whom he was talking. Here was a man who seemed very friendly towards him, and that was enough. In the evening he was about to take leave of Sri Ramakrishna, when the latter said, "Don't go on foot. Take some pice and arrange for a seat in a boat or carriage."

"Thank you," said Latu, "I have some pice with me."

"Are you quite sure?" said the Master with a smile. "Otherwise take them from me. Don't feel shy about it."

Latu also smiled as he jingled the coins in his pocket, and said, "Here they are, sir."

"Come again," said Sri Ramakrishna.

"Yes, sir, I will," said Latu.

From the very first Latu was deeply impressed. He returned home and again and again spoke to Ram about the kindness of Sri Ramakrishna. Two or three days later, Latu again went to Dakshineswar, arriving there just as the Master was about to

eat. The Master welcomed him and enquired if he had eaten. When he replied in the negative, he invited him to join him. Like the other orthodox people of his province, Latu did not take food cooked by Bengalis. So he declined the offer. The Master had in the mean time procured a plantain leaf for a plate, and a vessel of Ganga water. Seeing this Latu said, "Please do not trouble yourself. I will not eat here."

"Why not? The food has been cooked in the water of the Ganga. Besides, it is the sacred Prasad of Kali. Why should you hesitate to take it?" said Sri Ramakrishna.

"Please excuse me, I can't take it," Latu persisted.

Sri Ramakrishna still pressed the boy to eat, whereupon he suddenly said, "All right, I will take the food if it be your Prasad."

Latu scarcely knew what he had said. A minute before he had been reluctant to take food touched by a Bengalee. Now he thought that there could be no objection to eating Sri Ramakrishna's Prasad. He sat down to eat, the Master giving him some food from his own plate.

Latu was frequently employed by Ramchandra to carry presents of fruits and sweets to Sri Ramakrishna. The boy was glad to have these opportunities of going to Dakshineswar. Sri Ramakrishna from the very first saw the latent spirituality of the boy, and Latu also in his turn felt deeply attracted to the Master. Sometimes he would spend two or three days with him. It went on thus for some time when one day Sri Ramakrishna, extolling Latu's spirituality, proposed that Ram allow him to remain permanently at Dakshineswar. Ram considered it a great opportunity for the boy and cheerfully agreed. After that Latu stayed with Sri Ramakrishna. He was the first of that band of pure-souled young men who renounced the world and dedicated themselves to the service of the Master.

Latu loved Kirtana and other devotional songs. While at Dakshineswar, where religious singing was frequent, he would join in the song with great enthusiasm and lose himself in the ecstatic dance. Noticing the intense devotion of Latu and the other boys who by this time were gathered round him, Sri Ramakrishna one day prayed to the Divine Mother to vouchsafe some spiritual experiences to them. A few days after, Latu and the other boys began to feel religious ecstasy during their

meditation. Thus in the holy company of Sri Ramakrishna, Latu began to make rapid progress. The Master trained him in meditation and other devotional exercises.

Latu was quite innocent of academic learning. Sri Ramakrishna wished that he might at least have the rudiments of education and tried to take him through the Bengali alphabet himself. But Latu was a Bihari, and his pronunciation was different from that of a Bengali. Sri Ramakrishna showed him the first few letters with their pronunciation and asked him to repeat them. But Latu pronounced them in the Sanskrit fashion, much to the amusement of the Master, who corrected his pupil and asked him to repeat. Every time the result was the same. Teacher and student began to laugh, and the lesson was stopped for the day. The experiment was tried two or three times, and Sri Ramakrishna gave up in despair. Latu's education ended there.

Rakhal Chandra Ghosh first came to Dakshineswar in the year 1880, just a few months before the Master's meeting with Narendranath. He was born in 1863 at Basirhat, District of Twenty-four Parganas, where his father was a zemindar. Rakhal showed a marked predilection for religion even in his childhood, when he used to play at worshipping gods and goddesses.

He was married in his teens to a sister of Manomohan Mitra, from whom he first heard of Sri Ramakrishna. His very first meeting with the Master gave a glimpse of the deep and intimate relationship which was to exist between them. Referring to this meeting Sri Ramakrishna used to say, "Just a few days before Rakhal's coming, I saw in a vision Mother putting a child into my lap and saying, 'This is your son.' I shuddered at the thought and asked Her in surprise, 'What dost Thou mean? I too have a son?' Then She explained with a smile that it would be a spiritual child, and I was comforted. Shortly after this vision, Rakhal came, and I at once recognised him as the boy presented by the Divine Mother." He had another vision about him. One day he saw that Krishna, as the lovely shepherd-boy of Vrindaban, was standing on a full-blown lotus in the midst of a lake, and by His side stood the boy Rakhal looking at Him playfully. This vision led the Master to identify the devotee before him as one of those pure souls who had been incarnated as playmates of Sri Krishna.

Words fail to describe the closeness of the relation that existed between Sri Ramakrishna and Rakhal during the five short years they were associated on this mortal plane. On the one hand was the untiring solicitude of the Master for the spiritual welfare of the boy, on the other, the entire consecration of Rakhal to Sri Ramakrishna. Rakhal regarded him as a parent, and was like a child of three or four with him. This is what Sri Ramakrishna said of the boy's attitude towards him: "Every little while he ran to me, jumped on my lap and behaved just like a baby! He never wanted to leave my side. The very sight of me used to evoke in him a kind of childlike feeling that cannot be described. It impressed everyone who saw him. I, too, would have a corresponding feeling roused in me, and I would feed him with butter and sweets, and play with him as a mother plays with her child." The Master allowed Rakhal privileges that were vouchsafed to none else. He even took the boy on his shoulders. On one occasion he was so much struck with his simplicity that he burst into tears as he said, "You are so simple! Ah, who will look after you after I am gone." Rakhal was designed by the Divine Mother to look after the comforts of Sri Ramakrishna, but often it was the latter who had to care for the boy.

Being a worldly man, Rakhal's father was opposed at first of his son's association with Sri Ramakrishna and often tried to dissuade him from it. Once or twice he came to Dakshineswar to see what sort of a man the Master was. He was gratified to find that many leading men of Calcutta visited him. Besides the Master received him cordially, a practice which he always observed in such cases. After that there was no objection to Rakhal's going to Dakshineswar.

Hearing of Rakhal's marriage, Sri Ramakrishna was anxious for his spiritual welfare. One day the young wife came to Dakshineswar with her mother, who also was a great devotee. The Master studied the girl's physiognomy and was satisfied. He afterwards declared that she possessed great spirituality and that she would not stand in her husband's way.

Though supremely tender and affectionate towards the boy, Sri Ramakrishna did not hesitate to take him to task whenever he made any mistake. Once, without his permission, Rakhal ate some butter. Sri Ramakrishna admonished him severely for

this, saying, "Fie on you ! Instead of trying to check the craving for dainties, you have taken the butter without my knowledge !" Rakhal was sincerely sorry and never repeated the error. Boy-like he was jealous, at one time, of other boys' sharing Sri Ramakrishna's affection. He wanted a monopoly of it. The Master took care to remove these shortcomings, and he soon developed into a great character.

The Master could not bear the absence of Rakhal and wept when the boy was away. Once Rakhal went to Vrindaban and fell ill. This made Sri Ramakrishna exceedingly anxious as he feared that a sudden upheaval of past associations connected with the sacred spot might prove to be the cause of his giving up the body. He actually prayed to the Divine Mother for the boy's recovery and was only comforted by the Mother's assurance. It is said that through Sri Ramakrishna's grace Rakhal one day had a most realistic vision of his Chosen Ideal. No wonder that he became in later years a fit conduit for the transmission of Sri Ramakrishna's wonderful spiritual power.

Gopal Chandra Ghosh of Sinthi, near Calcutta, was a small trader and a man of the world in the fullest sense of the word. He met the Master about the same time as Mahima Charan. Overwhelmed by the shock of his wife's death, he was advised by a friend, who was a devotee of Sri Ramakrishna, to go to Dakshineswar for solace. On the first visit he found nothing very remarkable in Sri Ramakrishna. His friend advised him to go again, saying that holy men did not always reveal themselves at the first meeting. Gopal obeyed, and this time he felt the influence of the great teacher whose blessings he had come to seek. The Master's simple explanation of the utter unreality of the world appealed to him and made a lasting impression on his mind. As a result of this meeting, Gopal began to think seriously of renouncing the world to search for God. This resolution he ultimately translated into practice, devoting himself to the service of the Master during his last days. Sri Ramakrishna praised his orderliness and used to designate him as "overseer," or as "aged Gopal," because of his age.

NARENDRA NATH

The Datta family of Simla was one of most cultured and aristocratic in Calcutta. A leading member of this family, Durga Charan Datta, renounced the world after the birth of his first child. The child, whose name was Vishwanath, grew up under the loving care of his mother and became a distinguished attorney of the Calcutta High Court. He earned much money, which he spent lavishly, mostly in charity. He was a man of many accomplishments, among which was music. His religious views extended beyond the bounds of orthodox Hinduism ; and he read the Bible and the Persian poet Hafiz. His wife Bhubaneshwari was also gifted, noted alike for her practical common sense, and her power of endurance and faith in God. This happy pair was blessed in the year 1863 with a remarkable son in the person of Narendra Nath.

From his early years Narendra Nath was a distinguished figure among his playmates and companions. He was born with a strong body and a vigorous mind, but withal possessed a tender heart. Keen intelligence, extraordinary memory, deep power of thought, and vivid imagination, combined with a love for truth, a passion for purity, a spirit of independence, intrepidity in action, and compassion for the needy--all these marked him out as a prodigy from his very youth. He soon acquired a mastery in various branches of learning, particularly history and philosophy. He was also a skilled athlete and a good musician. It was his father who had encouraged him to acquire this all-round education.

Nature had endowed Narendra Nath with a deep religious disposition, in which concentration was the most pronounced factor. Even as a child he would purchase images of gods, and play at meditation before them. One day, in a secluded corner of the house, he actually lost himself in this mimic meditation, with the result that his relatives, after diligent search, had to force open the door and shake him to bring him back to normal consciousness. Later on, meditation became his favourite occupation, and unknown to others he spent a great part of the night in this way. Like many other young truth-seekers he

joined the Brahmo Samaj and once went to Maharshi Devendra Nath for religious instruction. The Maharshi found in him many characteristics of the Yogi and encouraged him in his meditations. Referring to his early visions, Narendra Nath said later on, "Every night, as I went to bed two visions floated before my mind's eye. One of them pictured me as successful man of the world, occupying the foremost place in society, and I felt that I actually had the power to carve out such a place for myself. A moment later would come the other vision, in which I found myself a wandering monk, dressed in a loin-cloth, living on chance morsels of food and spending the night under trees, depending solely on God. I felt that I could lead this sort of life, too. Of these two visions, the latter appealed to me the more, and I thought that the life of a monk was the noblest on earth, and that I would embrace it."

As a result of his deep study and penetrating intellect, Narendra Nath acquired great power in debate. In support of his views, he would marshal unanswerable arguments which silenced his opponents. A distinguished contemporary,¹ reading in the next higher class of his college, in an appreciative article thus describes Narendra Nath's many-sided genius: "Undeniably a gifted youth, sociable, free, and unconventional in manners, a sweet singer, the soul of social circles, brilliant conversationalist, somewhat bitter and caustic, piercing with the shafts of a keen wit the shows and mummeries of the world, sitting in the scorner's chair but hiding the tenderest of hearts under that garb of cynicism, altogether an inspired Bohemian but possessing what Bohemians lack, an iron will; somewhat peremptory and absolute, speaking with accents of authority and withal possessing a strange power of the eye which could hold his listeners in thrall I saw and recognized in him a high, ardent, and pure nature vibrant and resonant with impassioned sensibilities. He was certainly no sour or cross-grained puritan, no moral hypochondriac—he would indulge cynically in unconventional language except when he would spare my innocence. He took an almost morbid delight in shocking conventionality in its tabernacles, respectability in its booths; and in the pursuit of his sport would appear other than he was, puzzling and mystifying those outside his inner circle of friends.

¹ Dr. Brajendra Nath Seal.

But in the recesses of his soul he wrestled with the fierce and fell spirit of Desire, the subtle and illusive spirit of Fancy."

In his college days Narendra Nath drank freely of Western philosophy, the Agnostic doctrines of which for a time gave a rude shock to his inborn faith in God. But the inner promptings of his heart kept him at his spiritual struggle. He was not content with a theoretical knowledge of religion. He practised strict Brahmacharya and rigorous discipline, living on a vegetarian diet and sleeping either on the floor or on a blanket spread on it. Hour after hour he would pass in meditation. To quote Dr. Seal, "The conflict now entered deeper into his soul, for the creed of Universal Reason called on him to suppress the yearnings and susceptibilities of his artist nature and Bohemian temperament. His senses were keen and acute, his natural cravings and passions strong and imperious, his youthful susceptibilities tender, his conviviality free and merry. To suppress these was to kill his natural spontaneity—almost to suppress his self He confessed that though his intellect was conquered by the Universal, his heart owned the allegiance of the individual Ego and complained that a pale, bloodless reason, sovereign *de jure* but not *de facto*, could not hold out arms to save him in the hour of temptation. He wanted to know if my philosophy (of Pure Reason) could satisfy his senses, could mediate bodily, as it were, for the soul's deliverance; in short, he wanted a flesh and blood reality visible in form and glory; above all, he cried out for a hand to save, to uplift, to protect, a Shakti or power outside himself which could cure him of his impotence and cover his nothingness with glory—a Guru or master who by embodying perfection in the flesh would still the commotion in his soul."

His yearning to realize God increased. He got no help from the teachings of the Brahmo Samaj. In his eagerness for realization he one day approached Maharshi Devendra Nath and asked him point-blank, "Sir, have you seen God?" The answer he received did not satisfy him. It was at this critical moment that he first met Sri Ramakrishna at the house of Surendra Nath Mitra of Calcutta, about the month of November, 1880, when he was preparing for his First Examination in Arts. He sang a few songs. Sri Ramakrishna was keenly interested in the youth, found out all about him, observed his features, and

invited him to visit Dakshineswar at an early date.

The examination was passed. Narendra Nath's father began to make arrangements for his son's marriage, but the negotiations fell through at Narendra's stubborn refusal to marry. His cousin Ramchandra Datta, appreciated his motives in not marrying and said to him one day, "Why do you go about here and there in search of religion? If you have a real hankering for it, go to Dakshineswar." A little later he accepted an invitation from Surendra Nath to go with him and with some of his friends to Dakshineswar.

This is Sri Ramakrishna's account of the first visit of his greatest disciple:

"Narendra entered this room by the western door. He seemed careless about his body and dress, and unlike other people, unmindful of the external world. His eyes bespoke an introspective mind, as if some part of it were always concentrated upon something within. I was surprised to find such a spiritual man coming from the material atmosphere of Calcutta. A mat was spread on the floor, on which I asked him to sit. The friends with whom he had come appeared to be ordinary young men with usual tendency towards enjoyment. He sang a few Bengali songs at my request. These were the spontaneous outpourings of a devout heart desiring union with the Self. He put so much pathos into the song that I could not control myself, but fell into an ecstatic mood."

What happened next we give in Narendra Nath's own words:

"Well, I sang the song, but shortly after, he suddenly rose, and taking me by the hand, led me to the northern verandah, shutting the door behind him. It was screened from outside; so we were alone. I thought that he was going to give me some private instructions. But to my utter surprise, he began to shed profuse tears of joy as he held my hand, and addressing me most tenderly as one long familiar to him, said, 'Ah, you come so late! How could you be so unkind as to keep me waiting so long? My ears are well-nigh burnt in listening to the profane talk of worldly people. Oh, I am panting to unburden my mind to one who can appreciate my innermost experiences.' Thus he went on amid sobs. Then he stood before me with folded palms and began to address me, 'Lord, I know you are that

ancient sage, Nara—the Incarnation of Narayana—born on earth to remove the misery of mankind,' and so on !

"I was altogether taken aback by his conduct. 'Who is this that I have come to see,' I thought: 'He must be stark mad ! Why, I am but the son of Vishwanath Datta, and yet he dares to address me thus !' But I kept quiet, letting him go on. Presently he went back into his room, and bringing some sweets, sugarcandy, and butter, began to feed me with his own hands. In vain did I say again and again, 'Please give them to me, and I shall share them with my friends.' He simply said, 'They will have some afterwards,' and desisted only after I had finished them all. Then he seized me by the hand and said, 'Promise that you will come alone to me at an early date.' At his importunity I had to say 'yes' and returned with him to my friends.

"I sat and watched him. There was nothing wrong in his words, movements, or behaviour towards others. Rather, from his spiritual conversation and ecstatic states he seemed to be a man of genuine renunciation, and there was a marked consistency between his words and life. He said, 'God can be realized. One can see and talk to Him as I am doing with you. But who cares to do so ? People shed torrents of tears for their wife and children, for wealth or property, but who does so for the sake of God ? If one weeps sincerely for Him, He surely manifests Himself.' As I heard these things, I could not but believe that he was saying them not like an ordinary preacher, but from the depths of his own realization. But I could not reconcile his words with his strange conduct with me. So I concluded that he must be a monomaniac. But I could not help acknowledging the magnitude of his renunciation. 'He may be a mad man,' I thought, 'but only the fortunate few can have such renunciation. Even if insane, this man is the holiest of the holy, a true saint, and for that alone he deserves the reverential homage of mankind. With such conflicting thoughts I bowed before him and begged his leave to return to Calcutta.'

About a month passed before Narendra Nath paid his next visit to the Master. He went alone. We quote his own words about this eventful meeting: "I found him sitting alone on the small bedstead. He was glad to see me and calling me affectionately to his side, made me sit beside him on the bed.

But the next moment I found him overcome with a sort of emotion. Muttering something to himself, with his eyes fixed on me, slowly drew near me. I thought he might do something queer as on the preceding occasion. But in the twinkling of an eye he placed his right foot on my body. The touch at once gave rise to a novel experience within me. With my eyes open I saw that the walls, and everything in the room, whirled rapidly and vanished into nought, and the whole universe together with my individuality was about to merge in an all-encompassing mysterious Void ! I was terribly frightened and thought that I was facing death, for the loss of individuality meant nothing short of that. Unable to control myself, I cried out, 'What is this that you are doing to me ? I have my parents at home !' He laughed aloud at this and stroking my chest said, 'All right, let it rest now. Everything will come in time !' The wonder of it was that no sooner had he said this than that strange experience of mine vanished. I was myself again and found everything within and without the room as it had been before.

"All this happened in less time than it takes me to narrate it, but it revolutionized my mind. Amazed, I thought what it could possibly be. It came and went at the mere wish of this wonderful man ! I began to question if it were mesmerism or hyponotism. But that was not like, for these acted only on weak minds, and I prided myself on being just the reverse. I had not surrendered myself to the stronger personality of the man. Rather I had taken him to be a monomaniac. So what might this sudden transformation of mine be due to ? I could not come to any conclusion. It was an enigma, I thought, which I had better not attempt to solve. I was determined, however, to be on my guard and not to give him another chance to exert a similar influence over me.

"The next moment I thought, 'how could a man who metamorphosed at will a strong mind like mine be dismissed as a lunatic ? Yet this was just the conclusion at which one would arrive from his effusions on the occasion of our first meeting, unless, of course, he was an Incarnation of God, which was indeed a far cry. So I was in a dilemma about the real nature of my experience, as well as the truth about this remarkable man, who was obviously pure and simple as a child. My

rationalistic mind received an unpleasant rebuff at this failure in judging the true state of things. But I was resolved to fathom the mystery somehow.

"Thoughts like these occupied my mind during the whole of that day. But he became quite another man after this incident, and as on the previous occasion, treated me with great kindness and cordiality. His behaviour towards me was like that of a man who meets an old friend after a long separation. He seemed not to be satisfied with entertaining and taking all possible care of me. This remarkably loving treatment engrossed my attention all the more. At last, finding that the day was coming to a close, I asked his leave to go. He seemed very much dejected at this and gave me his permission only after I had promised to come again at my earliest convenience."

During his third visit Narendra Nath fared no better though from the first he was determined not to be influenced. Sri Ramakrishna took him that day to the adjacent garden of Jadunath Mallik. After strolling for some time they took their seats in the parlour. Soon the Master fell into a trance and as Narendra watched, he was suddenly touched by him. Narendra immediately lost all outward consciousness. When he came to consciousness after a while, he found that the Master was stroking his chest.

Though Narendra was ignorant of what had happened in the mean time, the Master learned many strange things regarding him. Referring to this incident he said later on, "I asked him several questions while he was in that state. I asked him about his antecedents and whereabouts, his mission in this world, and the duration of his mortal life. He dived deep into himself and gave fitting answers to my questions. They only confirmed what I had seen and inferred about him. Those things shall be a secret, but I came to know that he was a sage who had attained perfection, a past master in meditation, and that the day he learned his real nature, he would give up the body by an act of will, through Yoga."

It will be interesting to know what revelations the Master had regarding Narendra before the latter's arrival at Dakshineswar. This is how he described them:

"One day I found that my mind was soaring high in Samadhi along a luminous path. It soon transcended the stellar

universe and entered the subtler region of ideas. As it ascended higher and higher, I found on both sides of the way ideal forms of gods and goddesses. The mind then reached the outer limits of that region, where a luminous barrier separated the sphere of relative existence from that of the Absolute. Crossing that barrier, the mind entered the transcendental realm, where no corporal being was visible. Even the gods dared not peep into sublime realm, and were content to keep their seats far below. But the next moment I saw seven venerable sages seated there in Samadhi. It occurred to me that these sages must have surpassed not only men but even the gods in knowledge and holiness, in renunciation and love. Lost in admiration, I was reflecting on their greatness, when I saw a portion of that undifferentiated luminous region condense into the form of a divine child. The child came to one of the sages, tenderly clasped his neck with his lovely arms, and addressing him in a sweet voice, tried to drag his mind down from the state of Samadhi. That magic touch roused the sage from his superconscious state, and he fixed his half-open eyes upon the wonderful child. His beaming countenance showed that the child must have been the treasure of his heart. In great joy the strange child spoke to him, 'I am going down. You, too, must go with me.' The sage remained mute, but his tender look expressed his assent. As he kept gazing on the child, he was again immersed in Samadhi. I was surprised to find that a fragment of his body and mind was descending on earth in the form of a bright light. No sooner had I seen Narendra than I recognized him to be that sage¹."

Narendra Nath was now fully convinced of the extraordinary nature of that mighty power which was working through Sri Ramakrishna. His idea of the Master as a monomaniac was replaced by a feeling of profound respect for him. He was not a believer in the necessity of a Guru for the realization of God. How could a man, necessarily weak and short-visioned, be the unerring guide that he had to be in order to command another's implicit obedience? This idea had been strengthened by his association with the Brahmo Samaj. Now he realized that such a man could indeed exist, and that his personal influence was

¹Subsequent inquiry elicited from Sri Ramakrishna the fact that the divine child was no other than himself.

of inestimable value in bringing a man nearer to God. But still he was determined not to accept anything about Sri Ramakrishna without testing it by his own experience or reason. His faith in asceticism and renunciation, however, was strengthened by coming in contact with the Master.

The reader has already some idea of the wonderful relationship between Sri Ramakrishna and Narendra Nath. Narendra was a sceptic with no faith in the Hindu Gods. He laughed at many of the injunctions of the Hindu scriptures. Yet Sri Ramakrishna instructed him with the infinite love and patience of an ideal teacher. He was full of admiration for Narendra's pure character and strength of mind. But he had apprehensions for him in one respect. He knew that the boy was endowed with rare potentialities, a fraction of which was sufficient to make of him a powerful figure in the world ; but if this tremendous energy were not directed in a spiritual channel, it might be misused. He might become the founder of a new sect or party, but that was not his mission. He was to be the Lord's instrument to bring about a spiritual regeneration of mankind. Naturally, therefore, Sri Ramakrishna was anxious to direct his mind to the realization of God, and this was the secret of his intimate relationship with Narendra Nath. The whole story of this relationship can never be told. It was too deep for human expression. There was not the slightest tinge of worldliness in the love Sri Ramakrishna manifested for his wonderful disciple. If the latter failed to come to Dakshineswar for a few days, Sri Ramakrishna was disconsolate. He would weep, he would pray to the Divine Mother to send Narendra to Dakshineswar, refusing to be comforted till he came.

Once Narendra did not come for some days and the Master was feeling the separation keenly. He was eulogizing Narendra's wonderful qualities to a disciple, when he was completely overwhelmed. Unable to control himself, he went to the adjacent verandah and sobbed out, "Blessed Mother, I cannot live without seeing him." He checked himself a little and returned to the room. With a heavy heart he said addressing the devotees, "I have wept so much, but still he does not come. I am feeling an acute pain, my heart is being wrung, as it were. But he does not appreciate this." He again became restless and went out. Returning a few minutes later he said, "An old man pining and

weeping for somebody ! What will people think of me ? You are my own people, and I don't feel any constraint before you. But what will others think ? Yet I can't control myself." The devotees were amazed at the immensity of his love for Narendra. Sri Ramakrishna himself spoke about this great yearning thus: "For six months I suffered excruciating agony for him. I loved the other young devotees too, but it was nothing in comparison with what I felt for Narendra."

Narendra Nath was an implacable enemy of sham and iniquity, and fearlessly criticized them. His outspokenness was often mistaken for pride by people who had no insight into his real nature. But Sri Ramakrishna's evaluation of his nature was quite different. He used to say that Narendra Nath was pure gold without dross, that his acts of apparent pride and intolerance were the outcome of wonderful self-reliance and self-restraint, and that his indifference to public opinion was due to a innate purity of soul. The Master knew that the time was not distant when his personality would tower above the rest of the world, and that when he became a world-teacher, all these qualities would be utilized in relieving the distress of mankind and showing them the way to Freedom. Sri Ramakrishna's faith in Narendra Nath was unbounded, for it was based on the conviction that he could never be sullied by any impurity. His treatment of him was often very strange. Knowing full well that praise turned the head of mortals, he nevertheless spoke highly of Narendra to others in his very presence. One day there were assembled in his room Keshab Chandra Sen, Vijay Krishna Goswami with some other Brahmo devotees, and Narendra. The Master, in an exalted mood, cast his eyes first on the Brahmos and then on Narendra Nath, and a picture of the latter's future greatness flashed into his mind. After the meeting was over, he said addressing some devotees, "Well, if Keshab is possessed of one characteristic which has made him famous, Narendra has got eighteen such. Again, in Keshab and Vijay I saw the light of knowledge burning like a candle-flame ; but in Narendra it was like a blazing sun, dispelling the last vestige of ignorance and delusion." Narendra was among the audience. Instead of being puffed up by this unusual compliment, he felt insignificant in comparison with Keshab and Vijay, and protested to the Master, "Sir, what do you mean by saying such things ? People

will take you to be mad. How can you compare the renowned Keshab and the saintly Vijay with me, an unknown student? Please do not do so again." "I can't help it," said Sri Ramakrishna, "do you think those were *my* words? The Divine Mother showed me certain things, which I only repeated. And She never reveals to me anything but the truth." But this recourse to divine revelation did not satisfy Narendra Nath. He would question its authenticity saying, "Who knows if these are the revelations of the Mother or the caprices of your own brain? If I were in your position, I would surely attribute them to imagination pure and simple. Western philosophers tell us that we are often deceived by our senses, and the chances of deception are much more when there is a personal predisposition. Since you love me and always wish to see me great, it is but natural that these fancies come into your mind." Thus would Narendra Nath try to shake the settled beliefs of the Master. If the latter were in one of his lofty moods, these arguments were ignored as puerile; but if he were in the ordinary state of mind, he would be much upset, at a loss to know why such a pure soul as Narendra hesitated to believe in his visions. In his perplexity he would appeal to the Divine Mother and would be comforted only when She said, "Why do you listen to him? In a few days he will admit every word of it to be true."

It would be of interest to recall another incident in this connection. Once Narendra failed to come to Dakshineswar for one or two weeks. The Master sent for him, but in vain. So one Sunday he set out for Calcutta to visit Narendra. He knew that he would find him in the evening congregation of the Brahmos. He went to the Brahmo temple, never suspecting that his appearance there might cause any displeasure to its members. Rather he had reason to think that they were generally well disposed towards him. The preliminary ceremonies had been finished, and the preacher was about to deliver his sermon, when Sri Ramakrishna in a semi-conscious state entered. His unexpected arrival created a profound stir among the assembled devotees. All stood up to get a better view of him. Narendra had seen him from his place in the choir, and fathoming the motive of his sudden visit went to his side. The preacher stopped his sermon. The leading members present forgot to show even common courtesy to their august visitor. They had an idea that he was

responsible for the split in their camp, as Keshab and Vijay had changed their views after coming in contact with him. Sri Ramakrishna, who did not notice the disturbance caused by his presence, went straight to the pulpit and fell into Samadhi. This only added to the disorder, and it became necessary to turn off most of the lights in order to disperse the gathering. But it made confusion worse confounded, and everyone rushed for the door.

Narendra was mortified at the cold reception accorded to the Master. He now became anxious for his safety. As soon as the Samadhi was over, Narendra somehow managed to spirit him away through the backdoor and accompanied him to Dakshineswar. Referring to this incident he said later on, "I can hardly describe the pain I felt that day to see the Master humiliated for my sake. I reprimanded him for his thoughtless act. But he was not the least sorry for the incident and paid no heed to my words." Continuing he said, "I did not hesitate to say harsh words to him for his blind love for me without considerations of self-respect. I used to warn him that if he thought constantly of me he would become like me, like King Bharata of the old legend, who doting upon his pet deer was born in his next life as a deer ! These words had their effect on his childlike mind. He was alarmed to think of the probable consequences of his love for me. He said, 'What you say is quite true. Then what will become of me, for I cannot bear your absense ?' He went anxiously to the Kali temple, whence he returned in a few minutes, smiling, and said to me, 'You rogue, I won't listen to you any more. Mother says that I love you because I see the Lord in you, and the day I shall no longer see the Lord in you, I shall not be able to bear even the sight of you.' By this short but emphatic statement he dismissed that day everything that I had ever said to him on the subject."

From the very first Sri Ramakrishna had realized that Narendra Nath was the fittest person to be initiated into the mysteries of the Advaita Vedanta. He therefore asked him to read the *Ashtavakra Samhita* and other Advaita treatises. But to Narendra, a staunch member of the Brahmo Samaj, these writings appeared to be heretical. He would often rebel saying, "It is blasphemy, for there is no difference between such philosophy and atheism. There is no greater sin in the world than to think

of oneself as identical with the Creator. I am God, you are God, these created things are God—what can be more absurd than this? The sages who wrote such things must have been insane.” Sri Ramakrishna would be amused at the bluntness of his disciple, and not wishing to interrupt his ideas would remark, “You may not accept the views of these seers. But how can you abuse them or limit God’s infinitude? Go on praying to the God of truth and believe in that aspect of His which He reveals to you.” But Narendra did not give in easily. Whatever did not tally with reason, he considered to be false, and it was his nature to stand against falsehood. Therefore he missed no opportunity to ridicule the Advaita philosophy.

But the Master knew that Narendra’s was the path of Jnana, that in the end he would become enamoured of the philosophy of the Advaita and be led to the highest realization. For this reason he made it a point to talk on Advaita philosophy before him. One day he tried to bring home to the latter the identity of the individual soul with Brahman, but could not convince him. Narendra left the room and went to Pratap Chandra Hazra, and while smoking discussed the same topic with him. He said, “How can that be? This jug is God, this cup is God, whatever we see is God, and we, too, are God! Nothing can be more preposterous!” Hazra joined in this criticism and both laughed. Sri Ramakrishna was in his room, in a state of semi-consciousness. Hearing Narendra’s laughter he came out, with his cloth under his arm like a child. “Hullo! What are you talking about?” he said smiling, touched Narendra, and plunged into Samadhi. Narendra described the effect of the touch:

“That magic touch of the Master immediately brought a change over my mind. I was stupefied to find that really there was nothing in the universe but God! I saw it quite clearly but kept silent, to see if the idea would last. But that influence did not abate in the course of the day. I returned home, but there, too, everything I saw appeared to be Brahman. I sat down to take my meal, but found that everything—the food, the plate, the person who served, and even myself—was nothing but That. I ate a morsel or two and sat still. I was startled by my mother’s words, ‘Why do you sit still. Finish your meal,’—and began to eat again. But all the while whether eating or lying down or going to college, I had the same experience and felt myself always

in a sort of comatose state. While walking in the streets, I noticed cabs plying, but I did not feel inclined to move out of the way, for I felt that the cabs and myself were of one stuff. There was no sensation in my limbs, which I thought, were becoming paralysed. I had no satisfaction from eating, and felt as if somebody else were eating. Sometimes I lay down during a meal and after a few minutes got up and began to eat again. The result would be that on some days I would take too much, but it seemed to do no harm. My mother became alarmed and said that there must be something wrong with me. She was afraid that I would not live long. When this state altered a little, the world began to appear to me as a dream. While walking in Cornwallis Square, I would strike my head against the iron railings to see if they were real or only a dream. This state of things continued for some days. When I became normal again, I realized that I must have had a glimpse of the Advaita state. Then it struck me that the words of the scriptures were not false. Thenceforth I could not deny the conclusions of the Advaita philosophy."

The liberty which Narendra Nath enjoyed in his association with Sri Ramakrishna was unusual, as will be gathered from the following incident. He often argued with the Master against image-worship. One day, when the latter could not convince him, he said, "Why do you come here if you won't acknowledge my Mother?" Narendra replied, "Must I accept Her simply because I come here?" "All right," said the Master, "ere long you shall not only acknowledge my Blessed Mother, but weep in Her name." Then addressing the other devotees he said, "This boy has no faith in the forms of God and tells me that my supersensuous experiences are hallucinations, but he is a very fine boy, of pure instincts. He does not believe anything unless he gets direct proof. He has studied much and is possessed of great judgement and discrimination."

Sri Ramakrishna was skilled in the art of testing the fitness of his disciples. He used to adopt various means to try the real nature of a man and did not accept anybody as his disciple without knowing him thoroughly. Even Narendra Nath had to pass through this ordeal before the Master placed his trust in him. As an instance of this we may cite the following:

The arrival of Narendra Nath at Dakshineswar was always

hailed by Sri Ramakrishna with intense joy and exaltation of spirit. Even seeing him from a distance the Master's love would flow out and, as it were, enfold him. Often he would be overcome by emotion at the sight of Narendra and stammer, "Here comes Na—, here comes Na," unable to complete the sentence, and would then enter into Samadhi. A day came, however, when all this was changed, and Sri Ramakrishna began to treat Narendra with utter indifference. Narendra came, saluted the Master and sat before him. But this time the usual loving welcome was not forthcoming. The Master neither greeted him nor inquired after his welfare. After looking at him once as if he were a stranger, without a sign of recognition, Sri Ramakrishna remained silent, immersed in his own thoughts. Narendra Nath, thinking Sri Ramakrishna to be absorbed, left the room and joining Hazra, who was seated on the verandah, began to talk and smoke with him. But later, when he heard Sri Ramakrishna talking to others he went back into the room. Again the Master not only did not speak to him, but turned his face away from him. This attitude of indifference was maintained during the day. Towards evening Narendra Nath after saluting the Master returned to Calcutta.

A week later, when he came again, he found Sri Ramakrishna's attitude towards him unchanged. He spent the day conversing with Hazra and others, and before dusk, returned home. The third and the fourth time it was the same. But Narendra Nath showed no resentment and continued to visit Sri Ramakrishna as usual.

Between these visits Sri Ramakrishna sometimes sent someone to his home to inquire after his welfare. But whenever Narendra came near him he treated him with indifference. This went on for more than a month. Seeing that he still came to Dakshineswar, Sri Ramakrishna one day called him and said, "Tell me, how is it that though I don't speak a word to you, you still continue to come here?"

Narendra Nath replied, "Sir, it is not your words alone that draw me here. I love you and want to see you, therefore I come."

Sri Ramakrishna, highly pleased with the answer, said, "I was only testing you to find out whether you would stay away when I did not show you love and attention. Only one of your

calibre could put up with so much neglect and indifference. Any one else would have left me long ago and would never have come back."

On another occasion Sri Ramakrishna calling Narendra Nath to the Panchavati said to him, "You see, through the practice of severe spiritual discipline I have acquired supernatural powers. But what use can I make of them? I cannot even keep my body properly covered. Therefore, with the Mother's permission, I am thinking of giving them to you. She has made known to me that you will have to do much work for Her. If I impart these powers to you, you may use them when necessary. What do you say to that?"

Narendra Nath knew that Sri Ramakrishna possessed certain powers. But his natural yearning for God prompted him to delay acceptance of the offer until he could give it due consideration. After reflecting for a moment he asked, "Sir, will these powers help me towards God-realization?" Sri Ramakrishna replied, "No, they will not do that, but they will be very helpful to you when, after realizing God, you engage yourself in His work." Narendra Nath said, "Then I don't want them. Let me first realize God, and afterwards I shall decide whether I want them or not. If I accept these wonderful powers now, I may forget my ideal and in making use of them for some selfish purpose may come to ruin."

We are not certain whether the Master really wanted to impart these supernatural powers to Narendra Nath or whether he simply wanted to test him. But we do know that he was greatly pleased when Narendra Nath refused them.

Narendra Nath passed days happily at the feet of the Master who, by his silent influence, was gradually capturing his heart. His method of imparting spiritual knowledge to his disciples was wonderful. At a glance he could know what particular course would suit a particular devotee, and would set himself to mould his character accordingly. Like a master-athlete he would proceed with great caution and restraint, now owning defeat at his hands to strengthen his spirit of self-reliance, now putting forth wonderful energy to overpower him in the struggle. Realizing that in everyone was infinite strength, only requiring proper training to become manifest, he considered the pigmy as strong potentially as a giant. By intuition

he knew that a glorious future awaited his disciples, though they were ignorant of it. Holding that bright picture before their eyes, he encouraged everyone to remain in the path suited to them ; at the same time he warned them of the dangers to be expected. He kept himself minutely informed of their activities and always exerted his beneficent influence in controlling their youthful impetuosity. And all this was done silently and unobtrusively. Again and again he would tell his disciples to test his realizations. Once he said to Narendra, "Test me as the money-changers do their coins. You must not accept me until you have tested me thoroughly." One day when the Master was absent in Calcutta, Narendra came to Dakshineswar. Finding there was no one in his room, a desire arose in his mind to test the Master's renunciation of wealth. So he secreted a rupee under the bed. He then went to the Panchavati for meditation. After a time Sri Ramakrishna returned. No sooner had he touched the bed than he started back in great pain. Wondering, he was looking round, when Narendra came in and watched him silently. An attendant examined the bed, and the presence of the rupee was disclosed. Both the attendant and the Master were surprised. Narendra walked out of the room. When the Master was told of it later, he was glad that Narendra had tested him.

In the first part of 1884 Narendra Nath's father, who was the support of the family, suddenly died of heart disease. He had spent more than he had earned, and at his death the family was faced with dire poverty. The creditors were knocking at the door. Narendra's relatives, for whom his father had done so much, became enemies, even threatening to oust the family from the home. The burden of supporting six or seven people, therefore, fell upon Narendra ; and he was forced to seek employment. Everywhere he was met with refusals. Three or four months passed. We shall tell of this dark period in Narendra's own words:

"Even before the period of mourning was over I had to look about in search of a job. Starving and barefooted, I wandered from office to office under the scorching noonday sun with an application in hand, one or two intimate friends accompanying me sometimes. But everywhere the door was slammed in my face. This first contact with the reality of

life convinced me that unselfish sympathy was a rarity in the world—there was no place in it for the weak, the poor, and the destitute. Those who only a few days ago would have been proud to help me, now turned their face against me, though they had enough means at their disposal. Seeing all this, the world sometimes seemed to me to be the handiwork of the devil. One day, weary and footsore, I sat down in the shade of the Ochterlony Monument in the Maidan. Some friends of mine happened to be there, one of whom sang a song about the overflowing grace of God, perhaps to comfort me. It was like a blow on my head. I remembered the helpless condition of my mother and brothers, and exclaimed in bitter anguish and despondency, 'Will you please stop that song? Such fancies may be pleasing to those who are born with a silver spoon in their mouth and have no starving relatives at home. Yes, there was a time when I, too, thought like that. But today, before the hard facts of life, it sounds like grim mockery.'

"My friend must have been wounded. How could he fathom the dire misery that had forced these words out of my lips? Sometimes, when I found that there were not enough provisions for the family and my purse was empty, I would pretend to my mother that I had an invitation to dine out, and remain practically without food. Out of self-respect I could not disclose the facts to others. My rich friends sometimes requested me to come to their homes or gardens and sing, and I had to comply. But I always kept my woes to myself. They were not particularly inquisitive, except one or two. Only one perceived my real condition and put me under a deep debt of gratitude by sending anonymous donations to my mother.

"Some of my old friends, who earned their livelihood by unfair means, asked me to join them. Only one or two, who had learnt by bitter experience, sympathized with me. There were other troubles also. A rich woman suggested an ugly means, which I rejected with scorn, of ending my days of penury. I refused another woman also who came to me with similar overtures.

"In spite of all these troubles, I never lost my faith in the mercy of God. Every morning, taking His name, I got up and went out in search of a job. One day my mother overheard me and said, 'Hush, you fool, you are crying yourself hoarse for

God from your childhood, and what has He done for you?' I was stung to the quick. 'Does God really exist,' I thought, 'and if so, does He really hear the fervent prayer of man? Then why is there no response to my passionate appeals? Why is there so much woe in His benign kingdom?' Pundit Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar's words—'If God is good and gracious, why then do millions of people die for want of a few morsels of food?'—rang in my ears with bitter irony. I was exceedingly cross with God. It was a fit moment for doubt also to creep into my heart.

"It was ever against my nature to do anything secretly. On the contrary, from boyhood, neither fear nor anything else would prevent me from expressing my opinion. So it was quite natural now for me to try to prove to the world that God was a myth, or—if He existed—to call upon Him was fruitless. Soon the report gained currency that I was an atheist and did not scruple to drink or even frequent houses of ill fame. This unmerited calumny hardened my stubborn heart still more. I openly declared that in this miserable world there was nothing reprehensible in a man who, seeking for a brief respite, would resort to anything. Not only that, but if I was once convinced of the efficacy of such a course, I would not shrink from following it through fear of anybody.

"A garbled report of the situation soon reached the ears of the Master and his devotees in Calcutta. Some of these came to me for first-hand information and hinted that they believed in some of the rumours at least. A sense of wounded pride filled my heart on finding that they could think me so low. In an exasperated mood I gave them to understand plainly that it was cowardice to believe in God through fear of hell, and argued with them as to His existence or non-existence, quoting several Western philosophers in support. The result was that they took leave of me with the conviction that I was hopelessly lost, and I was glad. I thought that, perhaps, Sri Ramakrishna, too, would believe that, which thought raised my indignation again to the boiling-point. 'Never mind,' I said to myself, 'if the good or bad opinion of a man rests upon such flimsy foundations, I don't care.' But I was amazed to hear later that the Master had received the report coldly, without expressing an opinion one way or the other. And when one of his favourite disciples,

Bhavanath, said to him with tears in his eyes, 'Sir, I could not even dream that Narendra could stoop so low,' he was furious and said, 'Hush, you fool ! The Mother has told me that it can never be so. I shan't be able to look at you if you speak to me again like that.'

"But notwithstanding these forced atheistic views, the vivid memory of the divine visions I had experienced since my boyhood, and specially after my contact with Sri Ramakrishna, led me to think that God must exist, and that there must be some way to realize Him. Otherwise life would be meaningless. In the midst of all troubles and tribulations I must find that way. Days passed, and the mind continued to waver between doubt and certainty. My pecuniary troubles remained unchanged.

"The summer was over, and the rains set in. The search for a job still went on. One evening after a whole day's fast and exposure to rain, I was returning home with tired limbs and a jaded mind ; overpowered with exhaustion and unable to move a step forward, I sank down on the outer plinth of a house on the roadside. I can't say whether I was insensible or not for a time. Various thoughts crowded in on my mind, but I was too weak to drive them off and fix attention on any particular thing. Suddenly I felt as if by some divine power the coverings of my soul were removed one after another. All my former doubts regarding the co-existence of divine justice and mercy, and the presence of misery in the creation of a Blissful Providence, were automatically solved. By a deep introspection I found the meaning of it all and was satisfied. As I proceeded homewards I found there was no trace of fatigue in the body, and the mind was refreshed with wonderful strength and peace. The night was well-nigh spent.

"Henceforth I became deaf to the praise and blame of worldly people. I was convinced that I was not born like humdrum people to earn money and maintain my family, much less to strive for sense-pleasure. I began secretly to prepare myself to renounce the world like my grandfather. I fixed a day for the purpose and was glad to hear that the Master was to come to Calcutta that very day. 'It is lucky,' I thought, 'I shall leave the world with the blessings of my Guru.' As soon as I met the Master, he pressed me hard to spend that night with him at Dakshineswar. I made various excuses, but to no purpose. I had

to accompany him. There was not much talk in the carriage. Reaching Dakshineswar I was seated for some time in his room along with others, when he went into a trance. Presently he drew near me and touching me with great tenderness, began to sing a song, with tears in his eyes.

"I had repressed my feelings so long that now they overflowed in tears. The meaning of the song was too apparent—he knew of my intentions. The audience marvelled at this exchange of feelings between us. When the Master regained his normal mood, some of them asked him the reason of it, and he replied with a smile, 'Oh, it was something between him and me.' Then at night he dismissed the others and calling me to his side said, 'I know you have come for the Mother's work, and will not be able to remain in the world. But for my sake, stay as long as I live.' Saying this he burst into tears again. The next day with his permission I returned home. A thousand thoughts about the maintenance of the family assailed me. I began to look about again for a living. By working in an attorney's office and translating a few books, I got just enough means to live from hand to mouth, but it was not permanent, and there was no fixed income to maintain my mother and brothers.

"One day the idea struck me that God listened to Sri Ramakrishna's prayers; so why should I not ask him to pray for me for the removal of my pecuniary wants—a favour the Master would never deny me. I hurried to Dakshineswar and insisted on his making the appeal on behalf of my starving family. He said, 'My boy, I can't make such demands. But why don't you go and ask the Mother yourself? All your sufferings are due to your disregard of Her.' I said, 'I do not know the Mother, you please speak to Her on my behalf. You must.' He replied tenderly, 'My dear boy, I have done so again and again. But you do not accept Her, and so She does not grant my prayer. All right, it is Tuesday—go to the Kali temple tonight, prostrate yourself before the Mother and ask Her any boon you like. It shall be granted. She is knowledge Absolute, the Inscrutable Power of Brahman, and by Her mere will has given birth to this world. Everything is in Her power to give!' I believed every word and eagerly waited for the night. About 9 o'clock the Master commanded me to go to the temple. As I went I was

filled with a divine intoxication. My feet were unsteady. My heart was leaping in anticipation of the joy of beholding the Living Goddess and hearing Her words. I was full of the idea. Reaching the temple, as I cast my eyes upon the image, I actually found that the Divine Mother was living and conscious, the Perennial Fountain of Divine Love and Beauty. I was caught in a surging wave of devotion and love. In an ecstasy of joy I prostrated myself again and again before the Mother and prayed, 'Mother, give me discrimination ! Give me renunciation ! Give unto me knowledge and devotion ! Grant that I may have an uninterrupted vision of Thee !' A serene peace reigned in my soul. The world was forgotten. Only the Divine Mother shone within my heart.

"As soon as I returned, Sri Ramakrishna asked me if I had prayed to the Mother for the removal of my worldly wants. I was startled at his question and said, 'No, sir, I forgot all about it. But is there any remedy now ?' 'Go again,' said he, 'and tell Her about your wants.' I again set out for the temple, but at the sight of the Mother again forgot my mission, bowed to Her repeatedly and prayed only for love and devotion. The Master asked me if I had done it the second time. I told him what had happened. He said, 'How thoughtless ! Couldn't you restrain yourself enough to say those few words ? Well, try once more and make that prayer to Her. Quick !' I went for the third time, but on entering the temple a terrible shame overpowered me. I thought, 'What a trifle I have come to pray to the Mother about ! It is like asking a gracious king for a few vegetables ! What a fool I am !' In shame and remorse I bowed to Her respectfully and said, 'Mother, I want nothing but knowledge and devotion.' Coming out of the temple I understood that all of this was due to Sri Ramakrishna's will. Otherwise how could I have failed in my object no less than thrice ? I came to him and said, 'Sir, it is you who have cast a charm over my mind and made me forgetful. Now please grant me the boon that my people at home may no longer suffer the pinch of poverty.' He said, 'Such a prayer never comes from my lips. I asked you to pray for yourself. But you couldn't do it. It appears that you are not destined to enjoy worldly happiness. Well, I can't help it.' But I would not let him go. I insisted on his granting that prayer. At last he said, 'All right, they

will never be in want of plain food and clothing.' "

The above incident marked the opening of a new chapter in Narendra Nath's life. Hitherto he had not realized the significance of the Motherhood of God; he had had nothing but contempt for worship through images and symbols. But now all this was changed. The secret of the worship of a Personal God was revealed to him and lent a fulness and breadth to his vision. How glad Sri Ramakrishna was over this incident will appear from the following account of an eye-witness:¹

"Coming to Dakshineswar at noon I found the Master alone in his room and Narendra sleeping outside. Sri Ramakrishna was in a joyous mood, and as soon as I saluted him he said pointing to Narendra, 'Look here, that boy is exceptionally good. His name is Narendra. He would not accept the Divine Mother before, but did so yesterday. He is in straitened circumstances nowadays. So I advised him to pray to the Mother for riches, but he couldn't. He said he was put to shame. Returning from the temple he asked me to teach him a song of the Mother, which I did. The whole of the last night he sang that song. So he is sleeping now.' 'Then with unfeigned delight he said, 'Isn't it wonderful that Narendra has accepted Mother?' I said, 'Yes.' After a brief pause he repeated the question, and thus it went on for some time.

"At about 4 o'clock, Narendra came to Sri Ramakrishna before leaving for Calcutta. But no sooner had the Master seen him than he came closer and closer to him and sitting almost on his lap said, pointing first to himself and then to Narendra, 'Well, I see I am this, and again that. Really, I feel no difference—as a stick floating on the Ganga seems to divide the water which in reality is one. Do you see my point? Well, whatever is, is Mother. Isn't it?' After talking a few minutes like this, he wished to smoke. I prepared tobacco and gave him the hookah. After one or two puffs at it, he said he would smoke from the chillum (pipe). Then he offered it to Narendra saying, 'Smoke it through my hands'. Narendra, of course, hesitated. How could he defile the hands of his Guru by touching them with his lips? But Sri Ramakrishna said, 'What foolish ideas you have! Am I different from you? This is myself, and that, too, is myself.' He again put forth his hands towards the

¹ Vaikuntha Nath Sanyal.

lips of Narendra who had no alternative but to comply with the request. Narendra took two or three puffs ; Sri Ramakrishna was about to smoke, when Narendra hurriedly interfered, saying, 'Please wash your hands first, sir.' But his protest was in vain. 'What silly ideas of differentiation you have !' the Master said and smoked without washing the hands, talking all the while in an exalted mood. I was surprised to see Sri Ramakrishna, who could not take any food part of which had already been offered to somebody else, making this remarkable exception in the case of Narendra Nath. It gave me an idea of his love and kinship to Narendra. When, at about 8 o'clock, he was in his normal mood again, I and Narendra took leave of him and walked to Calcutta."

Afterwards Narendra often said, "Sri Ramakrishna was the only person who, ever since he had met me, believed in me uniformly throughout—even my mother and brothers did not do so. It was his unflinching trust and love for me that bound me to him for ever. He alone knew how to love another. Worldly people only make a show of love for selfish ends."

EXIT OF HRIDAY: HARISH AND BILAVANATHI

We shall now pause for a while to turn our attention to an event that happened in the Kali temple of Dakshineswar in the middle of the year 1881. It was the dismissal of Hriday. A change had come of late in his attitude towards the Master. He had grown avaricious by degrees. Visitors courted his favour in order to procure interviews with Sri Ramakrishna, with presents according to their means. The Master tried to dissuade him from accepting these gratuities and forbade the visitors to offer them. This, combined with the Master's rejection of Lakshmi Narayan's offer of ten thousand rupees, irritated Hriday. The greed for money banished from his heart his old love for his uncle, and he publicly taunted the latter in the most offensive terms. In consideration of his past services the Master bore with this insolent behaviour, though at times it drew bitter tears to his eyes. Instead of trying to develop sterling qualities similar to his uncle's, Hriday imitated his outward gesture, and singing and dancing before the devotees, he posed as another Paramahansa Deva. He extorted presents from the visitors, and at the same time tried to impose his own will upon Sri Ramakrishna at every step, making himself a positive nuisance at the temple.

Once Sri Ramakrishna was laid up with fever, when some of his devotees came to see him and presented him with cauliflower. He expressed great satisfaction but said, "Please hide it, and don't speak to Hriday about it, or he will abuse me." Then he began to praise Hriday's faithful services in the past and said, "Mother has amply recompensed him since he has served me so faithfully. He has purchased lands, he lends out money to people and is a most influential figure in this temple, where he is highly honoured." Scarcely had he finished these words, when Hriday entered the room. The Master got nervous and said to him, "Look here, I never asked them to bring cauliflower, they have brought it of their own accord. Believe me, I never told them to bring it." But Hriday flew into a rage and reprimanded him severely. Sri Ramakrishna appealed to the Divine Mother weeping, "O Mother, Thou hast removed

lips of Narendra who had no alternative but to comply with the request. Narendra took two or three puffs ; Sri Ramakrishna was about to smoke, when Narendra hurriedly interfered, saying, 'Please wash your hands first, sir.' But his protest was in vain. 'What silly ideas of differentiation you have !' the Master said and smoked without washing the hands, talking all the while in an exalted mood. I was surprised to see Sri Ramakrishna, who could not take any food part of which had already been offered to somebody else, making this remarkable exception in the case of Narendra Nath. It gave me an idea of his love and kinship to Narendra. When, at about 8 o'clock, he was in his normal mood again, I and Narendra took leave of him and walked to Calcutta."

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all my worldly ties. Thou hast freed me from all bondage. But Thou didst keep this humiliation in store for me at the hands of Hriday!" Suddenly his melancholy mood changed. He added smiling, "He loves me dearly and, therefore, scolds me. He is a mere boy and knows not what he does. Thou must not be angry with him, Mother!" With this he entered into Samadhi.

Hriday's conduct gradually became unbearable. He insulted everybody who came in contact with him. Even the other employees of the Kali temple were attacked. He paid no heed to the repeated warnings of Sri Ramakrishna. But at last the time for retribution came. The anniversary of the foundation day was celebrated in the temple with a festival. In the year of which we are speaking, Trailokya Nath, the son of Mathur, attended this festival with his wife and children. His eight-year-old daughter was present in the temple when Hriday was worshipping the goddess Kali. Hriday was seized with a desire to worship the Mother in the girl, and according to the Tantrika rites offered flowers and sandal-paste at her feet. When the girl returned home her mother noticed on her feet the marks of sandal-paste. Upon inquiry she learned all that had happened from the girl and was alarmed. A Brahmin worshipping the feet of a Shudra girl! It could not but bring a calamity upon the girl. Her fears worked upon Trailokya Nath, who ordered Hriday to leave the temple premises at once. Hriday told everything to his uncle. The Master asked, "Why did you act like that? Now what will you do?" Nothing daunted, Hriday answered, "Why do you worry about it, uncle? You come with me. You ought not to stay here any more. Some day they will insult you also." "Why should I go?" said the Master "I am not leaving." Hriday left the garden with a heavy heart. Shortly after, some one came and told Sri Ramakrishna that he, too, must leave the garden. Without a murmur, the Master rose and walked towards the gate. Trailokya saw him from a distance and hurrying up to him said, "Sir, where are you going?" The Master quietly replied, "Didn't you order me to leave the garden?" Trailokya implored him to come back and said, "Kindly pray to the Mother that the girl may not be injured!" "Through the Mother's grace she will be all right," said the Master and returned to his room, as if nothing had happened.

Rererring to Hriday's expulsion. Sri Ramakrishna said later on. "His high-handed conduct gradually became intolerable, and the Mother removed him as his presence was hampering Her work." The exit of Hriday made it easy for the young devotees of Sri Ramakrishna to wait on him and to avail themselves of the rare opportunity of moulding their lives under his direct guidance.

Hriday took up his residence at the adjacent garden house of Jadu Mallik. Sri Ramakrishna used to send his meals to him and also went to see him. Hriday requested him again to leave and proposed that he establish a Kali temple elsewhere, where they might live happily together. At this the Master is said to have remarked, "Well, do you mean to hawk me from door to door like a curio?"

Three years after the above incident, the Master was talking to a number of devotees, when he was informed that Hriday was waiting to interview him at the gate of Jadu Mallik's garden. Sri Ramakrishna, who never forgot his devoted servant, asked the audience to wait and went out to see him. Just beyond Rani Rasmani's garden, he found Hriday standing with folded hands. As soon as he saw the Master, Hriday fell flat on the ground. Sri Ramakrishna told him to get up. Hriday wept like a boy.

The Master also was moved to tears. With his hand he wiped them away so as to hide his emotion. It was a most touching sight.

Sri Ramakrishna: "Well, what makes you leave your home to come here?"

Hriday (weeping): "I have come to see you. To whom else shall I tell my troubles?"

Sri Ramakrishna (to console him, smiling): "The world is full of troubles. One cannot avoid them. What is yours?"

Hriday (weeping): "I am deprived of your company, and that's what is troubling me."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Why, it was you who said, 'Let each of us walk in one's own path!'"

Hriday: "So I did. But I was a fool."

Sri Ramakrishna: "All right. Good-bye now. I shall talk with you at leisure some other day. It is Sunday, and many visitors are waiting. What is the condition of the crops this year

over there ?”

Hriday: “Fairly good.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “All right. Come another day.”

Hriday prostrated himself again before the Master. Sri Ramakrishna returned to the temple, talking with the devotees about Hriday's faithful services as well as the torments to which he had been subjected by him.

One of the first devotees to live with the Master after Hriday's departure was Harish. He was a young man in affluent circumstances, with a wife and child. After paying a few visits to the Master, he sickened of the world and resolved to spend his days at Dakshineswar, renouncing home and family. Sri Ramakrishna was pleased with his sincerity, singleness of purpose and quiet nature, and gave him shelter. Thereafter Harish lived mostly at Dakshineswar, looking after the comforts of the Master and devoting his leisure hours to prayer and meditation. He bore calmly the threats and entreaties of his relatives. Indifferent to all the temptations of the world, he pursued silently and resolutely his own course towards the realization of the great end to which he had set himself. Referring to his unperturbed peace of mind the Master used to say, “Real men are dead to the world even while living. Look at Harish !” One day Harish learnt that his relatives were sorely afflicted at his leaving them, particularly his wife, who could neither eat nor sleep. He simply kept quiet. To test the strength of his mind, however, Sri Ramakrishna took him aside and said, “Your wife is suffering ; why don't you go home and console her ? What's the harm if you show a little kindness to the poor girl ?” “Sir,” replied Harish, “this is not the occasion to show kindness. If I try to be kind to her, there is a possibility of my forgetting the ideal and becoming entangled in the world. Kindly excuse me.” Sri Ramakrishna was highly pleased at his answer and often spoke of his spirit of renunciation to others.

Another devotee of rare qualities was Bhavanath Chatterjee, who was still in his teens when he met Sri Ramakrishna in 1881. His parents and relatives looked upon the Master as insane and warned Bhavanath not to frequent Dakshineswar. But he could not keep away from the Master, and against the wishes of his guardians, he often spent the night there. He was

a member of the Brahmo Samaj, and the impersonal aspect of God appealed to him strongly. Sri Ramakrishna loved him for his sincerity and devotion. Noticing his attachment to Narendranath, the Master often remarked that he was a fit companion for him and advised him to make the association very close. He was one of those whom Sri Ramakrishna classed as 'the eternally perfect'. While frequenting Dakshineswar, Bhavanath became a vegetarian and gave up the chewing of betel, considering it helpful in the religious life. But Sri Ramakrishna, who used to lay more stress on the internal purification of the heart than on the observance of external forms, said to him with a smile, "Well, what's the use of giving up fish or betel? They do not constitute the essence of religion. The real thing is renunciation of lust and wealth." Bhavanath was married early, but he turned his face from enjoyment. One day the Master, to test his earnestness, said to him, "Why don't you enjoy the world a bit?" Bhavanath was indignant and said, "Sir, should we, too, indulge in vulgar pleasures?" The Master was highly pleased with the reply. The very sight of Bhavanath's purity often roused divine emotions in Sri Ramakrishna's mind.

TARAK NATH AND NITYAGOPAL

Tarak Nath Ghoshal belonged to the Ghoshal family of Barasat, District of Twenty-four Parganas. His father, Ram Kanai Ghoshal, was legal adviser for the Rani Rasmani estate. He was a great devotee of the Divine Mother and used to frequent the Kali temple of Dakshineswar during the Sadhana period of Sri Ramakrishna. Thus he came to know the Master rather intimately. At that time the Master was suffering from the burning sensations which medicines could not cure. One day the Master told Ram Kanai, who was visiting him, of his affliction, and asked if he could suggest any remedy. Ram Kanai recommended him to wear on his arm his Ishta Kavacha—an amulet with the Lord's holy name—and he was instantly relieved.

From his very boyhood, Tarak used to practise meditation. The noble desire to pierce the veil that separates the seen from the unseen, stirred his mind at an early age. Like many religious-minded young men of the time Tarak was a member of the Brahmo Samaj under Keshab Chandra Sen, from whose writings he first came to know about the Master.

About this time he went to Mughal Sarai where he continued his religious discipline and spent hours with a friend discussing God and religion. One day, in answer to his query about Samadhi his friend said that real Samadhi was a rare phenomenon, but he knew of one man who had certainly experienced that blessed state. He told about Sri Ramakrishna and referred to some incidents of the Master's life. Tarak became deeply interested and eagerly awaited the day that he would be able to meet him.

After some time he returned to Calcutta and began to attend the religious services of the Brahmo Samaj. From a relative of Ramchandra Datta he learnt many things about the Master. Gradually the ideals of the Brahmo Samaj became unsatisfactory to him. He was eager to dive deep into the mysteries of spiritual life and realize the Truth. At this time he heard one day that the Master was going to visit Ramchandra. He resolved to avail himself of this opportunity to meet him, and when the

long-looked-for evening arrived, he went to the house of Ram, where, before a crowded audience, the Master in a semi-conscious state was talking. Tarak listened to the words with attention. He was anxious to learn something about Samadhi. He caught a few words and was astonished to find that that was the Master's subject. He was overjoyed and left with the determination to see the Master next Saturday, at Dakshineswar.

He did not know much about Dakshineswar, but a friend agreed to take him there. When they reached Dakshineswar the evening service was about to begin. The Master was walking on the bank of the Ganga with Bhavanath. Tarak approached him and touched his feet. Sri Ramakrishna learnt that he came from Calcutta and inquired of him about the health of Ramchandra and Narendra Nath, without even knowing if these two devotees were known to him. Tarak was much surprised to find the great interest the Master had in his devotees and said, "I do not know much about them. They must be well." The Master next inquired if he had seen him on the previous Saturday at the house of Ram. Tarak replied in the affirmative. Asking him to follow, the Master went to the northern verandah. Bhavanath spread a mat on the floor, on which all sat. "In what do you believe," asked the Master, "in God with form or without form?" "In God without form," replied Tarak. "You can't but admit the Divine Shakti also," said the Master, and he took the boy to the Kali temple. The evening service was going on. Sri Ramakrishna prostrated himself before the image. Tarak at first hesitated to follow his example, because, according to the ideas of the Brahmo Samaj, the image was nothing but a stone. But suddenly the thought flashed in his mind, "Why should I have such petty ideas? I hear that God is omnipresent. He lives everywhere. Then He must be present in the stone image as well." Whereupon he prostrated himself before the image.

Sri Ramakrishna requested Tarak again and again to remain overnight. "Stay here tonight," he said, "you can't gain any permanent good by the chance visit of a day. You must come here often." Tarak begged to be excused as he had already said he would stay with his friend. Then he took leave of the Master, promising to see him next evening. When he came again, Sri Ramakrishna asked him for some ice. Tarak did not

know where to get it. He spoke of the matter to a friend who was acquainted with Surendra, and the latter procured some and sent it to Sri Ramakrishna.

Tarak became better and better acquainted with the Master. The latter one day said to him, "I do not generally ask one who comes to me about his father's name or whereabouts. I only look into his heart and read his feelings. But I wish to know something about your father and people at home." He was agreeably surprised to learn that Ram Kanai was his father, and telling of the service the latter had done him, wished that he (Ram Kanai) might see him again. Some time later Ram Kanai came to Dakshineswar and prostrated himself before Sri Ramakrishna, who placed his foot on his head and entered into Samadhi. Ram Kanai eagerly grasped the Master's feet and burst into tears.

Tarak was greatly attracted by the Master. He was always on the look-out for an opportunity to see him. One day, probably on the occasion of his third or fourth visit, Sri Ramakrishna took him aside and asked him to put out his tongue. Then he wrote something on it, and the boy at once felt a strange sensation within him; his mind was withdrawn from the external world and he went into deep meditation. Another time the Master did the same thing with the same results.

Referring to the state of his mind at this time Tarak said, "I often felt inclined to cry in the presence of the Master. One night I wept profusely, standing in front of the Kali temple. Master was anxious at my absence, and when I went to him he said, 'God favours those who can weep for Him. Tears thus shed wash away the sins of former births.' Another day I was meditating in the Panchavati, when the Master came near. No sooner had he cast his glance at me than I burst into tears. He stood still without uttering a word. A sort of creeping sensation passed through me, and I began to tremble all over. The Master congratulated me on attaining this state and said it was the outcome of divine emotion. He then took me to his room and gave me something to eat. He could arouse the latent spiritual powers of a devotee at a mere glance."

Now Tarak realized that he had come to a man who could illumine the way to the ultimate goal of existence. The closer he associated with the Master, the more he felt that his ties

were being cut by the silent influence of his Guru. Married though he was, the world began to lose all attraction for him. He felt that Sri Ramakrishna was the consummation of all religions. To know him fully was to know God. With the awakening of this knowledge, Tarak's love and devotion for the Master increased a hundredfold. Sri Ramakrishna cherished a great love for this disciple. He took charge of him and moulded his spiritual life in all possible ways.

Another young man named Nityagopal was a frequent visitor at Dakshineswar and had a high regard for Sri Ramakrishna. He experienced great emotion at the name of God, and while listening to religious songs often fell into trances. Sri Ramakrishna loved him greatly and used to say that he had attained the Paramahansa state. Days and nights he would spend in prayer and meditation, and his chest glowed under the influence of divine fervour. He was, indeed, a great soul and the Master was seen to dance, in an exalted mood, clasping the hands of this fortunate youth. This indicated an exceptional degree of purity in Nityagopal. When both were in this lofty state, they spoke to each other in a language which was unintelligible to others.

One day the Master with a number of devotees came to the house of Ramchandra Datta. As soon as the Kirtana commenced, he went into Samadhi and put his feet on the lap of Nityagopal who was seated near by. Overcome with emotion the boy burst into tears. After a while the Master regained partial consciousness. A woman devotee had a motherly attitude towards this boy and often invited him to her home. The Master warned him against this sort of intimacy, saying, "Don't go there often. A Sannyasin must observe very rigid rules. He must not look at even the portrait of a woman; he should not associate with a woman even if she be a great devotee. A monk, even though he is a master of his senses, should observe these rules to set an example to others, who will learn renunciation from this ideal of self-denial. Otherwise they will succumb to temptation. This, of course, does not apply to householders. A Sannyasin is a world-teacher."

The reader may not have forgotten Gopal Sen, one of the two young devotees of Baranagore who used to come to Sri Ramakrishna during his Sadhana period and died prematurely.

The Master was sometimes heard to remark that, perhaps, Nityagopal was that boy reincarnated.¹

Balaram Bose of Baghbazar, Calcutta, came of a rich family having landed estates in Orissa and far-famed for its piety and generosity. From his youth he was of a deeply religious turn of mind and lived a retired life in holy places, leaving the management of his estate to the care of his cousin and living on a small monthly allowance. He spent most of his time in meditation and prayer or in studying the Vaishnava scriptures. At Puri he was attracted by the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna as they appeared in Keshab's journal. He felt a strong desire to see the man who could say such beautiful things about God. Just then a friend who had already paid several visits to Sri Ramakrishna and had wonderful glimpses of his personality, wrote to him about the God-intoxicated saint and asked him to come to visit him. Balaram waited no longer, specially as it so happened that his daughter's marriage ceremony was to take place at that time in Calcutta. The day following his arrival in Calcutta (1882), he started for Dakshineswar. There was a great crowd in the temple-garden, owing to the presence of Keshab Chandra Sen and his Brahmo followers. Balaram sat in a corner of the Master's room, and when the party went to eat, Sri Ramakrishna called to him and inquired if he had anything to ask. "Sir," said Balaram, "does God really exist?" "Certainly," replied the Master. "Can anybody realize Him?" "Yes," said the Master, "He reveals Himself to the devotee who thinks of Him as his nearest and dearest. Because you do not get any response by praying to Him once, you must not conclude that He does not exist." "But," again interrogated Balaram, "why can't I see Him when I pray to Him so much?" Sri Ramakrishna asked with a smile, "Do you really consider Him as dear to your heart as your own children?" "No, sir," said Balaram after a moment's pause, "I never felt for Him so strongly." The Master said in an animated voice, "Pray to God, thinking Him as dearer than your own self. Verily, I tell you. He is most attached to His devotees. He cannot but reveal Himself to them. He comes to man before he is sought. There is none more intimate and more affectionate than God."

vouchsafe unto me that love out of Thy infinite mercy!" Balaram had never heard such a soul-stirring prayer before. He was deeply moved.

His mind gradually underwent a great transformation. Following the instructions of Sri Ramakrishna, he made steady progress on the path of spirituality. He outgrew the cumbrous paraphernalia of external worship, tasted the essence of divine love and completely surrendered himself to the will of God. Charmed by contact with the Master, he introduced other members of his family to him.

Balaram was a staunch believer in non-killing. He could not even kill the mosquitoes that disturbed him at the time of meditation. One day, however, he was in rather a rationalistic mood, and thought that concentration of mind was the chief thing in religion. If, therefore, he could make his meditation steady by killing a few mosquitoes, he should not shrink from doing so. But it is not so easy to get rid of deep-rooted convictions. He still had his doubts, and to settle them, thought it best to consult Sri Ramakrishna. On his way to Dakshineswar he tried to recollect whether he had ever seen the Master killing any pests. But he could not recall any such instance. On the contrary, he thought him to be a strict observer of non-killing than himself. Why, he was the very personification of this virtue! So Balaram thought that his own mind must have deceived him and that it was useless to refer to him. But when he came to the Master's door, he saw a strange spectacle. There was Sri Ramakrishna picking bugs from his pillow and killing them one by one! As he approached and saluted, the Master said, "The pillow has a lot of bugs. Their bites distract the mind. So I am killing them." So it was that Balaram was answered.

BABURAM AND NIRANJAN

Baburam Ghosh first met the Master in a Hari-Sabha in Calcutta, where the latter went to hear the chanting of the *Bhagavata*. Some time before, he had heard from his elder brother about a monk in Dakshineswar, who, like Sri Gauranga, lost all consciousness of the world while uttering the name of God. On being asked if he would like to see the Sadhu, Baburam agreed. He was a class-mate of Rakhal, who, he knew, used to visit Dakshineswar. Next day he asked his friend about the saint, and it was settled that on the following Saturday they should go together to see him. On the appointed day they set out by boat and were joined on the way by a friend named Ramdayal Chakravarti, who used to visit the Master. Rakhal inquired of Baburam if he would like to stay for the night. Baburam thought they were going to a monk who lived in a hut, and replied, "Will there be accommodation for us?" Rakhal only said, "There may be." The question of food troubled Baburam, and he asked, "What shall we eat at night? There are shops there, I hope?" Rakhal simply said, "We shall manage somehow."

At sunset they reached the temple. Baburam was fascinated with the beauty of the place. It looked like fairyland. They entered Sri Ramakrishna's room, but he was not there. Rakhal said to them, "He has gone to the Kali temple. Please wait here a little and I shall call him." He hurried to the temple and in a few minutes was seen leading Sri Ramakrishna by the hand. The Master was in a state of God-intoxication, and Rakhal was carefully directing his staggering steps, warning him of the high and low places. Reaching his room he sat a while on the small bedstead, and presently regained normal consciousness. He inquired about the new-comer. Ramdayal introduced him. Sri Ramakrishna said, "Ah, you are a relative of Balaram. Then you are related to us also. Well, what is your native place?"

Baburam: "Antpur, sir."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Ah, then I must have visited it. Kali

and Bhulu of Jhamapukur also hail from that place, don't they?"

Baburam: "Yes, sir. But how do you know them?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Why, they are sons of Ramprasad Mitra. When I was at Jhamapukur, I used to go frequently to their house as well as to that of Digambar Mitra."

Saying this the Master caught hold of Baburam's hand and said, "Come closer to the light. Let me see your face." In the dim light of an earthen lamp he carefully studied the face. He was satisfied with the results of the examination, nodding his head in approbation. Then he examined the boy's arms and legs. Finally he said, "Let me see your palm." He looked at it and placed it upon his own, as if to weigh it. Then he said, "All right, all right." Turning to Ramdayal he said, "Do you know how Naren is? I heard that he was a bit indisposed."

Ramdayal: "I hear that he is well."

Sri Ramakrishna: "He has not come here for a long time, and I feel a great longing to see him. Will you ask him to come here one day? You won't forget it?"

Ramdayal: "I shall ask him positively."

It was about 10 o'clock. Ramdayal had brought a large quantity of food for Sri Ramakrishna who took only a part of it, arranging the rest to be distributed among the three devotees. Then the Master asked them where they preferred to sleep—in his room or outside. Rakhal chose inside; but Baburam thought that his presence might disturb the meditation of the saint; so he and Ramdayal decided to sleep outside, though the Master invited them to remain within. It was the month of April. The two devotees had hardly fallen asleep when they were roused by the cry of guards. Persently Sri Ramakrishna approached them reeling like a drunkard, with his cloth under his arm. Addressing Ramdayal he said, "Hullo, are you asleep?" "No, sir," was the reply. Then the Master said with great eagerness, "Please tell him to come. I felt as if somebody were wringing my heart like this," and he twisted his cloth. His every word and gesture expressed the unspeakable agony of heart at the separation from Narendranath. "What love!" Baburam thought "But how queer that he does not respond!" Sri Ramakrishna proceeded a few steps towards his room. Then he returned and said to Ramdayal, "Then don't

forget to tell him about it." He repeated these words and went back to his bed with staggering gait. About an hour after, he again appeared and unburdened his mind to Ramdayal. "Look here, he is very pure. I look upon him as the manifestation of Narayana, and can't live without him. His absence is wringing my heart like this," and he again twisted his cloth. Then he said in bitter anguish, "I am being put on the rack, as it were, for his sake. Let him come here just once!" This scene was repeated at hourly intervals throughout the night.

When Baburam met Sri Ramakrishna the next morning, he found him quite a different man. There was no trace of anxiety on his face. He asked Baburam to walk around the Panchavati.

Baburam was about twenty years of age although he appeared to be much younger and very handsome. In his childhood, if any one teased him about marriage, he would lisp, "Oh, I shall die then." At eight years his ideal was to lead a life of renunciation in a hut shut out from public view by a thick wall of trees, with a fellow monk. When he saw the Panchavati, he was surprised to find that it tallied exactly with his boyish dreams. How could he have foreshadowed the picture so accurately? He, however, kept this to himself and returned to Sri Ramakrishna. In response to a question as to how he liked the place, he only said it was nice. The Master then asked him to visit the Kali temple, which he did. When he took his leave of Sri Ramakrishna, the latter affectionately asked him to come again.

Baburam was greatly impressed. "He is an exceptionally good man," he thought, "and dearly loves Naren. But strange that Naren does not go to see him." The next Sunday at 8 o'clock he again came to Dakshineswar. A few devotees were seated before the Master. Sri Ramakrishna welcomed him and said, "It is nice that you have come. Go to the Panchavati, where they are having a picnic. And Narendra has come. Have a talk with him." At the Panchavati Baburam found Rakhal, who introduced him to Narendra and some other young devotees of the Master, who had assembled there. From the first Baburam was filled with admiration for Narendra. To look at him was to love him. Narendra was talking with his friends. Presently he burst into a song which charmed Baburam. With bated breath he listened saying to himself, "Ah, how

versatile he is !”

Baburam began to associate closely with Sri Ramakrishna and soon surrendered himself at his feet for ever. The Master had a very high opinion of him. He knew him to be absolutely pure and classed him among the Nitya-siddhas and the Ishwarakotis. In a vision he saw Baburam as a goddess with a necklace. This gave him an inkling as to the personality of this disciple. “It is a new vessel, and milk can be put into it without fear of turning”—this was what he used to say of this boy. Owing to his absolute purity Baburam was deemed a fit attendant for the Master, who liked to have him about. He would often fall into Samadhi when he touched the boy. His mother was a great devotee, and when Sri Ramakrishna asked her to leave her son in his care, she gave her ungrudging consent. Baburam was one of those fortunate souls whose touch the Master could bear at the time of Samadhi, and many were the occasions when he was found supporting Sri Ramakrishna in that state lest he should fall and be injured. The Master, from the very beginning, treated him as his own, and took great pains to help him to realize God. Once the boy pressed him hard for the experience of Bhava, that absorption in God which is the maturity of devotion Sri Ramakrishna prayed to the Divine Mother for this, but was told that Baburam would get the monistic experience (Jnana) instead of Bhava. This delighted the Master.

One day Hazra, in his characteristic way, was advising Baburam and some other young boys to ask of Sri Ramakrishna something tangible in the shape of powers, instead of, as was their wont, merely living a jolly life with him with plenty of good things to eat. Sri Ramakrishna, who was near, scented mischiefmaking, and calling Baburam to his side said, “Well, what can you ask ? Isn't everything that I have yours already ? Yes, everything I have earned in the shape of realizations is for the sake of you all. So get rid of the idea of begging, which alienates by creating distance. Rather realize your kinship to me and gain the key to all that treasure.” In a thousand ways such as this, the Master, like a watchful mother, trained the young souls under his care, so that they might develop without selfishness.

Another young devotee of extraordinary spirituality came

to Sri Ramakrishna and found in him his ideal. It was Nitya Niranjan Ghosh, for shortness called Niranjan. He was eighteen years of age and a medium for a group of spiritualists in Calcutta. He heard from people about the great spiritual power of Sri Ramakrishna and one day came to Dakshineswar to see him. As usual, a number of devotees were assembled to whom the Master was talking. Towards evening, when the gathering had dispersed, he turned to Niranjan and asked all particulars about him. He spoke quite familiarly with the boy, as if he were an old acquaintance. Finally he said, "My boy, if you think always of ghosts, you will become a ghost, and if you think of God, you will become God. Now, which do you prefer?" "Well, of course the latter," replied the boy. Then Sri Ramakrishna advised him to sever all connection with spiritualists, to which Niranjan agreed. As it was getting dark, the Master invited him to spend the night at Dakshineswar, rather than walk the long distance home. Niranjan said his uncle would be anxious, and took leave of the Master, promising to come another day.

The visit, though brief, profoundly impressed the boy. In the midst of his daily occupations his mind flew often to Dakshineswar. Two or three days after, he went again. The Master was filled with joy at seeing him and embracing him warmly said, "Niranjan, my boy, the days are flying fast. When will you realize God? This life will be in vain if you do not realize Him. When will you devote your mind wholly to God! Oh, how anxious I am for you!" The boy was surprised. "A strange man this," he thought, "why is he so anxious for my spiritual welfare?" He could not find an answer to the question, but the words of the Master appealed to him more forcibly than any he had ever heard. He spent the night there and the two following days. When he returned home, his uncle, who had been extremely anxious about him, took him to task and put him under strict surveillance. Niranjan was much aggrieved at being debarred from visiting Dakshineswar. But afterwards his uncle relented and gave him freedom to go to Dakshineswar whenever he liked.

In the course of a few days Niranjan recognized his relationship with Sri Ramakrishna, and the latter took him as one of his own. His striking simplicity, his heroic scorn for the

temptations of the world, and the innate purity of his nature made him highly beloved of the Master, who found in him the marks of an Ishwarakoti. When pressed about marriage by his relatives, the boy told them that they simply wanted to bring him to ruin. Needless to say, the Master was highly pleased to hear of this bold reply and often praised Niranjan before others saying, "He is a fortunate man who is not at all attached to the world. I see Niranjan seated on a ball of light. He does not care for anything in the world. When the call to leave it comes, he will do so without a moment's hesitation."

Niranjan was of a violent temper and often resorted to drastic measures for the righting of wrongs. One day, on his way to Dakshineswar in a country-boat, some of his fellow passengers began to speak ill of Sri Ramakrishna. Niranjan at first strongly protested against this, but finding it had no effect, decided to teach them a lesson. He began to rock the boat violently thundering out that he would drown them all in mid-stream for their misconduct. His robust frame and furious mood cowed the offenders. They apologized for their foolishness, which ended the matter. When Sri Ramakrishna heard of this incident, he rebuked Niranjan for his violent temper. "Anger is a deadly sin," he said, "and why should you be subject to it? The indignation of a good man is like a line drawn on water. It vanishes at once. Foolish people say all sorts of things. You should ignore them completely as beneath your notice. If, instead, you fight with them, you will have to spend all your life doing that. Just fancy what harm you were about to do in the heat of the moment!"

At one time Niranjan was compelled to accept a job in an office. Sri Ramakrishna was grieved at the news and remarked, "I would not have been more pained, had I heard of his death!" A few days, after when he met Niranjan, he found that he had been compelled to accept the job in order to maintain his aged mother. With a sigh of relief Sri Ramakrishna said, "Ah, then it is all right. It won't contaminate your mind. But I tell you, if you had done so for your own sake, I could not have touched you. Really it was unthinkable that you could stoop to such humiliation. Didn't I know that my Niranjan had not the least trace of impurity in him?"

¹ 'Niranjan' literally means 'untainted'.

Hearing this remark, one among the audience said to Sri Ramakrishna, "Sir, you are depreciating service in very strong terms. But how can one maintain one's family without earning money?" The Master replied, "Let him who likes do so. I don't dissuade everyone. I say this only to these young aspirants who form a class by themselves." Niranjan, as we shall see, did not work long, for he soon dedicated himself entirely to the service of the Master.

MAHENDRA NATH GUPTA

It was in March 1882, that Mahendra Nath Gupta, better known as Master Mahashay, or M., first met Sri Ramakrishna. He was a Brahmo by faith and the Headmaster of the Vidya-sagar High School at Shyambazar, Calcutta. One evening accompanied by a friend he came to visit Rasmani's temple-garden. Wondering at the beauty of the place, he stopped before Sri Ramakrishna's room. The Master was on his cot, and the devotees were sitting on the floor, listening to him. Mahendra was charmed with what he heard. Everything about the place appeared beautiful to him. He took a stroll round and returned to Sri Ramakrishna's room. The fragrance of incense was coming out through the closed door. Ascertaining from a maidservant that he might go in, Mahendra with his friend entered the room. The Master was alone. Mahendra saluted him with folded hands and was asked to sit down. Sri Ramakrishna then inquired about his occupation, where he resided, and one or two other points. Mahendra noticed, however, that now and then the Master was absent-minded. Later on he came to know that this was a state of God-consciousness. He said to the Master, "Perhaps this is your prayer-time. We should take out leave now." Sri Ramakrishna replied in an abstracted mood, "Well, no—not exactly that." Presently they left. The Master asked them to come again.

The next morning Mahendra went again to Dakshineswar. Sri Ramakrishna greeted him with his usual affability and began to talk with him. Among other things, he inquired after Keshab's health and said how anxious he had been for his recovery. Then he asked, "Are you married?"

Mahendra: "Yes, sir."

Sri Ramakrishna (with a start to Ramlal): "Ah, he is already married!"

Mahendra was ashamed. He thought, "Is it so bad to marry?" Sri Ramakrishna asked, "Have you any children?" Mahendra said apologetically, "Yes, sir." The Master was sorry to hear the news. Mahendra for the first time heard that he had not led an exemplary life. His previous notions received

a rude shock. After a while the Master said to him with a kindly look, "Well, there are some good signs on your body. I can tell them from one's forehead and eyes." "Well," he added after a pause, "what do you think of your wife? Is she possessed of attributes leading Godward or the opposite?"

Mahendra: "She is good, but she is ignorant."

Sri Ramakrishna (sharply): "And you are wise!"

This was a severe blow to Mahendra's ideas about himself. Sri Ramakrishna asked him, "What aspect of God appeals to you—with form or without form?" Mahendra was puzzled to think how He could be both, as it involved a contradiction. But he answered, "His formless aspect, sir." "Very well," said the Master, "one should hold to one ideal. It is excellent that you believe in the Impersonal God. But you must not have the idea that your view alone is right and all others are wrong. You must know that both aspects are equally true. You stick to that one which you like." Mahendra was surprised to hear this; nevertheless he argued the point.

Mahendra: "Taking it for granted that God is with form, He cannot of course be the clay image—?"

Sri Ramakrishna (interrupting): "Of course not. He is embodied consciousness."

Mahendra: "Well, sir, is it not our duty to make it clear to the image-worshippers that the clay image is not God? That they should worship God in an through that image?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Bah, it has come to be the fashion with you Calcutta people to lecture and teach others. Why don't you teach yourselves first? Who are you to teach others? The Lord of the universe will look to that—the Lord who has created this world, who has made the sun and moon, man and beast; He has provided for the subsistence of His creatures; He has created parents who love their offspring; He will do the teaching. He has provided for so many things, and will He not arrange to bring men to light if need be? He is the inmost Self of all, and if there has been anything wrong in worshipping the clay image, does He not know that people are thereby calling on Him only? He will be satisfied with that very form of worship. Why do you trouble your head about that? You had better try to attain knowledge and devotion yourself."

These animated words touched Mahendra's heart and conquered his egotism. This was his first and last attempt to argue with the Master.

Sri Ramakrishna: "You were referring to the worship of a clay image. Even that has its use. It is God who has provided for so many forms of worship. He has made all this to suit different grades of aspirants. The mother prepares different kinds of food for her children, according to their power of assimilation.

"A mother has five children. A fish has been brought, and out of it she has prepared several dishes to suit different stomachs. For one she has cooked Polao (which is a very rich dish), for another a sour preparation, for a third a hot curry, for a fourth fish fry, and so on—according to their taste and capacity to digest. Do you see the point?"

Mahendra was convinced. He then asked how one might turn one's mind to God.

Sri Ramakrishna: "One must constantly take the name of God and sing His praises. One should also associate at intervals with genuine devotees or monks. The mind is not inclined to God if one lives always in the world, amid wordly pursuits. It is extremely necessary to resort now and then to solitude and meditate on Him. Without this it is most difficult at the initial stage to engage the mind in God."

Mahendra: "How should one live in the world?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Go on with all your duties, but fix the mind on God. Live with all—wife, children, parents—and serve them as if they were your most intimate relatives. But in your heart you should know that none of them belongs to you.

"A maidservant in a rich family attends to all her duties, but her heart is on her home in her native place. Again, she looks after her master's children as if they were her own, and says, 'My Ram,' or 'My Hari'. But she knows quite well they are not hers.

"If before attaining devotion you try to mix with the world, you will be all the more entangled. You will be upset by dangers, grief, and mortification. And the more you will dwell on worldly things, the greater will be your attachment.

"Smear your fingers with oil if you want to open the jack-

fruit, or the milky exudation will stick to them. Devotion to God is like this oil.

"But to attain this devotion solitude is required. For churning butter one must set the curd in a quiet place. The curd won't set if it is removed from one place to another. Next, sitting in a quiet place and disengaging yourself from other work, you have to churn the curd. Then you get the butter.

"The world is like water and the mind like milk. If you put milk in water, they get mixed up and you can't separate the two. But if you make curd out of the milk and churn that into butter, you may put it in water and it will float. Therefore you must first churn the butter of knowledge and devotion through practice in solitude. Then if you put it in the water of the world, it won't mix up, but will float.

"At the same time you must discriminate that lust and wealth are unreal and God alone is real. What is money worth? It gives us food and clothing and a place to live in—that's all. But it does not help us to realize God. So money cannot be the end of life. This is what is called discrimination."

Mahendra: "Sir, is it possible for one to see God?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Undoubtedly. Retiring now and then to solitude, taking His name and singing His praises, and discrimination—these are the means."

Mahendra: "Under what circumstances can one see him?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "One can see Him if one weeps for Him with a great intensity of heart. People shed jugfuls of tears for their wife or children, or for money; but who cares to weep for God? One must pray to Him with the required degree of intensity."

The Master then burst into a song—"Pray to Her with real longing, and see if you don't realize Her." After this he continued:

"As soon as you have this yearning, it means that the rosy dawn is already in sight, and the sun will soon be up. Immediately after yearning comes realization.

"The thing is, we must love God—as a mother loves her child, as a devoted wife loves her husband, and a worldly man loves his property. If one's love for God equals the sum total of those three, one can realize Him.

"We must pray to Him with a yearning heart. The kitten

knows only how to mew. It remains wherever its mother places it, sometimes in the kitchen, sometimes on the ground, or sometimes on a bed. When it feels pain it only mews—it knows nothing else. And the mother comes from wherever she may be, attracted by this mewling.”

Next Sunday Mahendra went again to Dakshineswar. He could think of nothing but Sri Ramakrishna since his first visit. The Master was talking with Narendra about seeing God in everything and of different types of men, paying a tribute to those who never get attached to the world. This day Mahendra was blessed with a sight of the Master's Samadhi. The next day he came again; and as he stepped into the room, Sri Ramakrishna said with a hearty laugh to Narendra and others, “Well, a peacock was given a dose of opium at four o'clock. The next day it appeared again precisely at that hour. It was under the spell of opium and came for another dose!” (Laughter.)

The Master then began to joke with the boys, making them rock with laughter. Mahendra wondered if this could be the same man whom on the previous day he had seen immersed in Samadhi. Presently the devotion of Hanuman was discussed, and Sri Ramakrishna, in the course of singing a song on that subject, fell into Samadhi. After some minutes the tension slackened, the body lost its stiffness, the face became smiling, and the senses resumed their functions. He was uttering the sweet name of Rama, and tears were trickling down his cheeks. All these various changing moods of the Master puzzled Mahendra.

Mahendra soon became one of Sri Ramakrishna's most devoted disciples and tried to be present wherever the Master was. He began to take notes of the Master's conversations and was instrumental in introducing many of his students and relatives to Sri Ramakrishna, thus changing their lives. Not only did he frequent Dakshineswar, but at one time he spent many days there, practising religious exercises under the direct guidance of the Master.

Mahendra's intimate relationship with the Master can be realized from the following words which the latter addressed to him:

“Mother shows me everything beforehand. In the Panchavati I saw the Sankirtana of Sri Gouranga. In that procession

I think I saw you as well as Balaram.

"I have come to know who you are, by listening to your recital of the *Chaitanya Bhagavata*. You are of my own group—of the same stuff—like a father and his son. So long as you did not come here, you forgot yourself. Now you will know your real nature. The Lord Himself comes in the form of a Guru and teaches everything.

"The 'naked one' (Totapuri) told me a story. Once a tigress attacked a flock of goats. A hunter saw her from a distance and shot her. She was carrying and gave birth to a cub as she expired. The cub grew up with goats, and learned to graze and bleat like them; it even ran away like them when attacked by an enemy. One day a huge tiger came upon the flock as it was grazing. To his surprise he saw a tiger grazing with it. Disregarding the goats he seized this tiger, which began to bleat and tried to run away. Dragging it to a pool of water he said, 'Look at your face in the water. See, it is like mine.' Then he forced some meat into its mouth. At first it refused to eat it, but when it got the taste, it ate. Then the strange tiger said, 'You have been living with goats and grazing like them! Shame on you!'

"Grazing is being satisfied with lust and wealth and bleating and fleeing like the goats is behaving like vulgar people. To go away with the tiger means to take refuge in the Guru who illumines the heart, and to know him as one's very own. To see the face truly reflected in water is to know one's real nature."

Seeing Mahendra's rationalistic turn of mind Sri Ramakrishna would warn him against vain disputation. "It is no good arguing too much," he said "First, God, and then, the world. One can easily know the world after realizing God. Therefore I say, do not argue any more. If you do, you will be a loser. Some time I used to walk alone at night weeping and saying, 'O Mother, blast my tendency to disputation!' Promise that you won't argue any more."

Mahendra agreed. The Master added: "I wept and prayed, 'O Mother, teach me what is written in the Vedas and the Vedanta, in the Puranas and the Tantras.' And one by one She has shown me everything."

YOGINDRA NATH

About the year 1882 another young man of surpassing religious merit found his haven of peace at the feet of Sri Ramakrishna. This was Yogindra Nath, the eldest son of Nabin Chandra Ray Chaudhury, who came of an aristocratic Brahmin family of Dakshineswar and was a man of the orthodox type. He owned very little property, and his only hope lay in his promising son, Yogin, who might one day be able to shoulder the responsibilities of his father. Yogin developed a religious tendency very early in life. Even when he was a child of five, he was often overwhelmed by strange feelings. In the midst of play a serious thought would suddenly cloud his face, and he would lose all interest in the sport. He would withdraw into a quiet corner and looking at the sky think, "Where am I? Certainly I don't belong here. These are not my playmates—I have other friends and companions. I must have come from one of those stars. But which one? I don't know. And why am I here if I belong to another world? Is this all a dream?" Thoughts like these would trouble him, and he would be seized with a hankering for familiar regions. As he grew up, however, these boyish imaginations gradually left him. He evinced particular zeal in worship, often spending two or three hours daily in meditation. He was reading in a missionary school, but liked sacred books better than his textbooks. He was still in High School when he met Sri Ramakrishna.

Yogin used to visit the garden of Rani Rasmani. One evening he found that a large concourse of men had gathered in and about a certain room in that garden, and were listening to something within with rapt attention. He had heard that an eccentric Brahmin who had formerly been a priest in that temple, lived there. Yogin was curious to know what was going on, and drawing near the door listened attentively. From the first few words that fell on his ears he understood that he whom local opinion nicknamed "the mad priest" was talking. In simple and homely language he was explaining the philosophy of love. Yogin was caught in the spell of the words and stood transfixed. When the meeting dispersed Yogin went home, saying to him-

self, "This man must be a saint who has seen God. People do not understand this and, therefore, they laugh at him. How else can one account for such words of devotion, such divine love, and such ecstasy in the name of God? However, let me watch him more closely."

The next day he went straight to Sri Ramakrishna, who was glad to learn who he was. He said, "Well, you come of a family which is well known to me. Formerly I often went to your house to hear the *Bhagavata* and other scriptures." He mentioned some elderly members who were very kind to him, and said, "It is well that we have come to know each other now. You must come often. You are born in a noble family and are possessed of many characteristics of spiritual greatness. You will easily advance on this path."

Yogin was deeply impressed by the Master's kind treatment and visited him daily. He kept this a secret from his parents, for they shared the common belief about the Master. To throw them off the scent, he used to collect choice flowers for his father's worship. This contact with Sri Ramakrishna brought about a revolution in his ideas. The attainment of God became the sole object of his life. Though he knew that his academic studies would be of ultimate financial value to his family, yet he would not give his attention to the world, for he had learned from Sri Ramakrishna that through the renunciation of lust and wealth alone lay the path to the realization of God. At first he tried to reconcile both God and Mammon; when unsuccessful, he gave up the attempt. He resolved not to marry. He would seek a job away from home and thus help the family. This arrangement, he thought, would enable him to pass most of his time in prayer and meditation. Thus determined, he said one day to his father, "It is useless for me to go to school any more. Rather I shall try to secure an appointment in some office. With your permission I shall go to my uncle at Kanpur and try for a post." His father acquiesced and sent him there.

But Yogin could not secure an appointment. So he spent most of his time in prayer and meditation. His absent-mindedness alarmed his uncle, who wrote to Yogin's father urging him to give his son in marriage. Nabin Chandra thought that to be the wise thing to do and made arrangements for the marriage without telling Yogin, lest he runs away. Nabin had learnt this

from a former experience. He then wrote to his brother-in-law to send Yogin home on the pretext of his mother's illness. With an anxious heart Yogin came home, only to find everybody jubilant over his coming marriage. He was shocked. He told his father plainly that he was opposed to marriage. His father tried to persuade him, but he remained obdurate. Nabin was in an awkward position, for he had given his word to the bride's father. It would be utterly disgraceful to withdraw now. At last Yogin's mother came and, with tears in her eyes, implored her son to marry and save his father's reputation. "Even if you are unwilling, marry for my sake, dear," she said. The mother's passionate appeal undermined the son's firm resolution. Yogin bowed his head before the decree of fate and was married.

Though he did it for the satisfaction of his mother, yet he understood what it meant for him. His marriage had ruined all his religious prospects, and besides, had raised an insurmountable barrier between himself and Sri Ramakrishna. With drooping spirits he said to himself, "Who is more wretched than the man who cannot keep his promise. Will Sri Ramakrishna love me as before? He is the embodiment of renunciation, and I shall have to pass my days in pursuit of sense-gratifications! Of what use is my going to him any more? He marked out the path of spirituality for me, but I could not follow it. I told him of my desire to lead a celibate life, and I remember with what joy he hailed it. How can I appear before him now?" His heart sank within him as he surveyed his position. He decided not to see Sri Ramakrishna again, and tried to divert his mind with business.

The Master heard about the marriage and was desirous of seeing the boy. He sent for him repeatedly, but Yogin did not go. Everyone said that he was different since his marriage. As Yogin disregarded his repeated summons, Sri Ramakrishna one day called one of Yogin's friends to him and said, "What sort of a man is Yogin? Before he left for Kanpur, he took some money from a temple officer, of which he neither gives any account nor does he come himself, even though sent for. Will you please go and tell him this?" Yogin remembered that he had been given a few rupees to purchase some things. The article had been sent long ago, but he still retained the change

consisting of a few annas. At first he thought of returning them personally, but after his marriage he decided not to visit Sri Ramakrishna again and was on the look-out for someone through whom he could return the money. Sri Ramakrishna's complaint cut him to the quick. He said to himself, "True, I may have lost all hope, but I am not so far gone as to become a swindler. Does he really consider me so low as that? All right, I shall go and return those annas this very day."

That very afternoon Yogin started for Rani Rasmani's garden, and as he was reflecting on his hard lot, he came to the eastern verandah of Sri Ramakrishna's room, whence he saw the Master seated on his small bedstead, with his cloth thrown carelessly on his lap. As soon as Sri Ramakrishna saw Yogin, he rushed forward to meet him, holding the cloth under his arm like a boy. His face shone with unusual radiance, as if he were brimming over with divine power! Catching hold of the boy's hand he said, "What if you are married? Haven't I, too, been married? What is there to be afraid of in that? (Putting his hand on his own chest) If this (meaning himself) is propitious, even a hundred thousand marriages will be powerless to affect you. If you desire to be in the world, bring your wife here one day, and I shall turn her mind in such a way that she will be ever a help to you in your spiritual progress. But if you are averse to a householder's life, I shall devour your attachment to the world." He was emitting fire!

Yogin was stupefied. What was this that he heard? Was it possible? He felt himself suddenly transported from a region of utter despair to one of bright hope. Was it for this that Sri Ramakrishna had accused him, that he might get him to come to see him? A dead weight was lifted from his heart, and he breathed freely again. The Master did not speak a word about the money, and on Yogin's referring to it he said, "Leave it in that broken tin box."

Under the eyes of the Master, Yogin passed his days happily, adding new strength to his spirit of renunciation. The cloud that had gathered in his mind vanished completely, and life again appeared worth living. His parents murmured at his indifference to the world. One day his mother said, "If you don't care to earn money, well, why did you marry?" "Didn't I tell you again and again," replied Yogin, "that I had no

intention of marrying? But I had to give way to your tears." "What do you mean?" exclaimed the mother "How could you marry unless you had the desire to do so?" Yogin started at her. "Gracious God!" he said to himself. "I committed the act to please my mother, and now she talks like this! Fie on the world! Sri Ramakrishna is the only person I have met, whose words and thoughts tally exactly." From that day he was disgusted with the world, and finding his only solace in the company of Sri Ramakrishna, spent the days and sometimes the nights in the temple-garden.

The Master was not slow to detect Yogin's one great failing—his extreme softness of heart. He warned the boy against this weakness. One day Yogin was sent to the market to buy a pan. He appealed to the religious feeling of the shopkeeper and asked him to supply a good article. The purchase finished, he returned home. But it was afterwards found that the pan had a crack in it. When the Master heard of it, he said to Yogin reproachfully, "A devotee must not be a fool. A shopkeeper is not thinking of God at all when dealing with his customers. In trusting him you acted stupidly. You should have examined the pan before purchasing it. See that you be not deceived thus in future. When you go out shopping, first know the real price by going round several shops, and thoroughly examine the thing before you buy. And don't fail to demand the little extras where allowable." Is it not marvellous to hear such advice from a man who, perhaps a minute before, had been plunged into the bliss of Samadhi? But Sri Ramakrishna was full of such contrasts.

Yogin was gentle to a fault. One day Sri Ramakrishna found cockroach among his clothes. He asked Yogin to take it outside and kill it. The boy took it to some distance and let it go. The Master inquired if he had carried out the order. Yogin told him what he had done. Thereupon Sri Ramakrishna rebuked him saying, "I told you to kill it, and you let it go! You must carry out my orders to the very letter, or you will have to repent in more serious matters."

Another day Yogin was in a boat on his way to Dakshineswar. One of the passengers, when he learnt of Yogin's destination, began to vilify Sri Ramakrishna, even calling him names. Yogin was mortified and was on the point of launching

into a vindication of the Master, when he realized that it was ignorance of the Master's real nature that prompted the criticism. So he decided to say nothing. On reaching Dakshineswar, he narrated the incident to Sri Ramakrishna. He thought that the Master would simply laugh. But to his surprise he said, "The man abused me, and you pocketed the insult without a murmur ! Do you know what the scriptures advise in such a case ? One should either kill the vilifier or leave the place at once. And you bore it tamely !" It was to put some mettle into the boy that the Master treated the incident thus.

The reader will remember in this connection the very different advice he gave to another disciple of his, viz Niranjan, on a similar occasion. It was his idea to lead the boys in his charge to perfect harmony, of which his own life was the brilliant example. So we find him putting mettle into the one and toning down the fiery nature of the other. The prescriptions in both cases were suited to the nature of the disease.

As already remarked, Sri Ramakrishna often encouraged his disciples to test him before accepting him as their guide. He always advised them to notice if the religious teacher practised what he preached. One evening, Yogin, with the Master's permission, decided to spend the night with him, with a view to serving him if needful. They went to bed. At midnight Yogin suddenly woke up to find the door of the room open and Sri Ramakrishna absent. At first he thought that he might be walking outside. But he was not. Suddenly a suspicion came to his mind—could he have gone to see his wife ? Could it possibly be that his actions were contrary to his teachings ? Unpleasant though the thought was, he resolved to ascertain the truth, and he kept watch upon the door of the concert-room, where the Holy Mother lived. Suddenly he heard the sound of slippers from the direction of the Panchavati. A moment later Sri Ramakrishna stood by his side. "Well what do you want here ?" he asked. Yogin hung his head in shame for having doubted the Master, and could not utter a word. The Master understood at once and relieved the boy by saying, "Well done. You must examine a Sadhu by day and by night before believing in him." Though forgiven, Yogin could not sleep any more that night.

According to the rules of the Kali temple, every day Sri Ramakrishna received a portion of the offerings made to the

deities. One morning he found that his share had not been sent to his room. This irregularity disturbed him, so that he himself went to the office to inquire about it. Yogin was surprised at this, for he knew the Master did not care much about eating. It was inexplicable to him, except as a remnant of the priestly instinct to exact what was one's due. He was amused at the thought that in spite of his great realizations, the Master could not overcome the petty tendencies of his class. At this moment Sri Ramakrishna returned and said, "Look here, Rani Rasmani has bequeathed her large estate to the service of this temple, so that the offerings may be distributed among devotees and Sadhus. That part of the offerings which comes to this room is taken only by devotees who come here with a yearning for God, and the gift of Rasmani is turned to good account. But what use is made of the other part which goes to the priests of this temple? They sell it in the market, and some even feed their mistresses with it! I fight with the men in charge, for the share that comes here, in order that Rasmani's object may be at least partially fulfilled." And so Yogin discovered that every act of the Master, no matter how trivial it might appear, was fraught with deep significance.

Sri Ramakrishna gave Yogin much liberty, as he knew that the boy was one of the Mother's chosen few. He called him also an Ishwarakoti—a rare distinction to which only half a dozen of the Master's disciples could aspire. Under the loving care of Sri Ramakrishna Yogin grew to be a man who completely triumphed over the sex-idea. He was renunciation personified.

MEETING WITH SOME NOTABLES

Among the notable visitors to Sri Ramakrishna at this period was the famous Ashwini Kumar Datta, the patriot-devotee of Barisal. We give below extracts from his reminiscences of the Master as recorded in a Bengali letter he wrote to M., the recorder of the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*:

It was, perhaps, during the Puja holidays of 1881 that I met Sri Ramakrishna for the first time. Keshab Babu was to come that day. I arrived at Dakshineswar by boat and, going up the steps of the landing ghat, asked someone where the Paramahansa was living. "There is the Paramahansa!" the man replied, pointing to a man reclining against a bolster in the northern verandah facing the garden. When I saw that he wore a black-bordered cloth and reclined in that way, I thought, "What kind of a Paramahansa can he be?" There he sat leaning against the bolster with his hands clasped across his drawn-up knees. Then I thought, "He evidently is not accustomed to the use of pillows as gentlemen are, so perhaps he is a Paramahansa." At his right, very near the pillow, sat a gentleman whose name, I learnt, was Rajendra Lal Mitra, who afterwards became Assistant Secretary to the Government of Bengal. A little further off sat some others.

After a few moments, the Master said to Rajendra Babu, "Please see if Keshab is coming." Some one looked and said, "No"! After a brief interval, hearing a sound outside he again said, "Please look once more." Again some one went and came back with the same reply. Then Sri Ramakrishna smiled and said, "The rustling of leaves makes Radha exclaim, 'Oh, here comes my Beloved!' You see, Keshab always tantalises me like this!" At twilight Keshab came with his party.

When Keshab bowed before him touching the ground with his forehead, the Master returned the salutation in the same manner. Shortly after, he raised his head and in a state of semi-consciousness said addressing the Mother, "Thou hast brought the entire population of Calcutta here—as if I were going to deliver a lecture! I can't do that! Do it Thyself if Thou likest. I can't do these things!" Still in the ecstatic

mood, with a divine smile, he said, "I am Thy child, I'll simply live and move. I'll eat, sleep, and do such trifles, but I can't give lectures." Keshab Babu's heart overflowed with emotion as he looked at Sri Ramakrishna. Seeing the Master in this state I thought, "Can this be pretence?" I had never seen anything like it before, and I am not a credulous man.

Coming back from this exalted state, the Master addressing Keshab said, "Keshab, once when I went to your temple, I heard you say, 'Plunging into the river of devotion, we shall be carried straight to the ocean of Sachchidananda.' Then I looked up (at the gallery where Keshab's wife and other ladies were sitting) and thought, 'What will become then of these ladies?' You are householders, how can you reach the ocean of Sachchidananda all at once? You are like the mongoose that has a stone tied to its tail. If something happens, it runs up and sits in a niche in the wall. But how can it remain there? The stone pulls it down with a thud to the floor. You may practise a little meditation, but the weight of wife and children will drag you down. You may dive into the river of devotion, but you must come up again—dive and come up again. How can you dive once for all?"

"Is it altogether impossible for householders?" Keshab Babu asked. "What about Maharshi Devendra nath Tagore?"

Sri Ramakrishna softly repeated, "Devendra Nath Tagore, Devendra, Devendra," and saluted him several times. Then he said, "His case is similar to that of a man who used to celebrate the Durga Puja with great pomp. Goats would be sacrificed from morning till evening. But after a few years the sacrifice was not so imposing. Then some one said, 'How is it that the sacrifice at your place has become such a tame affair?' 'Why,' the other replied, 'my teeth are gone now!' So it is but natural that at his advanced age Devendra should be practising meditation. But he is a good man for all that."

"You see, so long as a man is under the spell of Maya, he is like a green coconut. If you want to use the tender part of it, you cannot help scraping a little of the shell also with it. But the man who has gone beyond Maya is like a ripe coconut. The kernel is free from the shell—when you shake it, you know that it is so. The Soul then becomes loose from the body. It is no longer attached to it."

"It is the ego that is the cause of all trouble ! The wretched 'I' is almost indestructible. It is like the peepul tree that grows from the rubbish of a dilapidated house. You may cut it down today, but tomorrow you will find it growing from the roots again. The same is the case with the ego. You may wash a cup in which onions have been kept, seven times, but the strong odour remains."

In the course of the conversation he said to Keshab Babu, "Well, Keshab, is it true that your Calcutta Babus deny the existence of God ? One such Babu was going up the stairs. He took one step, but before taking the next one he cried, 'Oh ! My side ! My side !' and fell unconscious. There was a hue and cry for a doctor. But before he came the man was dead. And such people say, 'There is no God !' "

After an hour or so the Kirtana commenced. What I saw then I shall probably never forget in this life or the life to come. All began to dance, Keshab included, with the Master in the centre and the others in a circle around him. In the course of the dance the Master suddenly stood motionless. He was in Samadhi ! It continued for a long time. Hearing and seeing all this, I understood that he was a real Paramahansa.

Another day, perhaps in 1883, I went to see him with a few young men of Serampore. Seeing them he asked, "Why have they come ?"

"To see you," I replied.

Sri Ramakrishna: "What is there to see in me ? Why don't they go and see the buildings and temples ?"

Myself: "Sir, they have not come to see these things. They have come to see you."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Ah ! They must be flints then. There's fire in them. You may keep a flint under water for a thousand years, but the moment you strike it, it emits fire. They must be of that type. But if you strike us, it will be in vain."

At this last remark we smiled. I went another day. When I bowed down to him and took my seat, he said, "Can you bring me some of that thing—half-sour, half-sweet—that begins to fizz when you push down the cork ?" "You mean lemonade ?" I asked. "Yes," he said, "will you bring me that ?" I think I brought him a bottle. So far as I remember, he was alone that day. I asked him a few questions.

Myself: "Do you observe caste?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Well, not much to boast of. I ate a curry at Keshab Sen's house. Let me tell you what happened once. A man with a long beard (a Mohammedan) brought ice for sale, but I was not inclined to take it. A little later, some one brought me a piece of ice from that same man, and I ate it. You see, caste restrictions fall away by themselves. When coconut trees and palm-trees grow up, the leaves drop off by themselves. Caste observances go like that. But don't tear them off as those fools do (meaning the violent reformers)."

Myself: "What do you think of Keshab Babu?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Oh, he is a saintly man."

Myself: "And Trailokya Babu?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "A fine man and a good singer."

Myself: "And Shivanath Babu?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "A good man; but he argues too much!"

Myself: "What difference is there between the Hindus and the Brahmos?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Not much. When they play on oboes here, one man holds the same note right along, while another plays different melodies. The Brahmos are harping on the same note—the formless aspect of God; but the Hindus enjoy His various aspects."

I told the Master that I had met Achalananda Tirthavadhuta of Barisal. This led to the following conversation:

Sri Ramakrishna: "Isn't that Ramkumar of Kotrang?"

Myself: "Yes, sir."

Sri Ramakrishna: "How did you like him?"

Myself: "I liked him very much."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Well, whom do you like better, him or me?"

Myself: "How can you draw a comparison? He is a scholar, but are you one?"

The Master was a little puzzled and became silent. A moment later I said, "He may be a scholar, but you are an interesting man. There is great fun in your company." Then he smiled and remarked, "Well said! Well said!"

He asked me, "Have you seen my Panchavati?"

"Yes, sir," I replied.

He told me a little of his religious practices there. He also

spoke about Totapuri. Then I asked him, "How can I realize God?"

"Well," he replied, "He is always drawing us as a magnet draws iron. Only when the iron is covered with dirt, it is not attracted. As soon as the dirt is washed off the mind by weeping, it is instantly drawn to Him."

As I was noting down his words, he remarked, "Look here, only crying 'hemp' will not produce intoxication. You must get the hemp, rub it in water and drink it." Later he said, "You have to live in the world. So have your mind slightly intoxicated with the thought of God. While you are at work, let that feeling of inebriation be with you. You cannot, of course, be like Shukadeva and drink and drink till you lose all consciousness of the body."

"If you have to be in the world, give Him power of attorney, make over all your responsibilities to Him. Let Him do as He likes."

All this time the Master was seated on the floor. Now he got up and stretched himself on his cot. Then he said, "Please fan me." I began to fan him, and he was silent. After a while he said, "Oh! It's so hot! Why don't you just dip the fan in water?" I remarked, "Ah, you, too, have your likings!" The Master smiled and said, "Yes—why not?" "Very well," I said, "have your full measure of them." I cannot express in words the immense pleasure I derived from his company that day.

When I paid my last visit to him (28rd May, 1885), the Headmaster of our school, who had just then graduated, was with me. As soon as Sri Ramakrishna saw him, he asked me, "Ah, where did you pick him up? A fine fellow!" Then he continued, "You are a lawyer. And you are so clever! Can you give me a little of that cleverness? The other day your father came and stayed here for three days."

"How did you like him?" I asked.

"A nice man," the Master replied: "But sometimes he talks too much."

I said, "Please help him to get over this tendency when you next meet him." The Master smiled. I asked him to give us some advice. He said, "Do you know Hriday?"

"Your nephew?" I inquired: "I know him only by name." Then he said, "Hriday used to say to me, 'Uncle, please don't

exhaust your stock of instructions at once. Why should you repeat the same thing over and over?' I would reply, 'You fool! What's that to you? These are my words, and I shall repeat them a hundred thousand times if I like. You keep quiet.'" I smiled and said, "Exactly so."

A little later he got up and, after repeating Om several times, began to sing a song that began: "Dive deep, dive deep, my mind, in the ocean of divine beauty." He had scarcely rendered the first few lines when he himself dived deep and fell into Samadhi!

When the Samadhi was over, he began to pace the room and with both hands pulled up his wearing cloth till it reached the waist. One end of it was trailing on the floor, and the other was hanging loose. Nudging my companion, I whispered, "See how nicely he wears his cloth." A moment later he threw away the cloth with the words, "Ugh! What a nuisance! Off with it!" He began to pace up and down the room. From the northern end he brought a stick and an umbrella and asked, "Do these belong to you?" Scarcely had I replied "No," when he said, "I knew it! I can judge a man by his stick and umbrella. They must belong to that man who was here some time ago and swallowed a lot of food."

He sat down, still nude, on the northern end of his cot, facing the west and began the following conversation:

Sri Ramakrishna: "Well, do you consider me ungentlemanly?"

Myself: "Of course not. Why do you ask that?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Well, Shivanath and others think so. When they come I have to wrap a cloth around me. Do you know Girish Ghosh?"

Myself: "Which Girish Ghosh? He who conducts a theatre?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes."

Myself: "I have never seen him, but I have heard about him."

Sri Ramakrishna: "A good man."

Myself: "They say he drinks."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Let him! How long will he continue that? Do you know Narendra?"

Myself: "No, sir."

Sri Ramakrishna: "I wish very much that you would meet him. He has passed the B.A. examination and is unmarried."

Myself: "Very well, I shall meet him."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Today there will be a Kirtana at Ram Datta's house. You may meet him there. Please go there this evening."

Myself: "All right."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes, do. And don't forget."

Myself: "It is your command, and I obey. Surely I'll go."

He showed us the pictures in his room and asked if a picture of Lord Buddha could be had. I answered, "Very likely."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Please let me have one."

Myself: "Yes, I'll bring one when I come again."

But alas! I never had the opportunity.

That evening I went to Ram Babu's house and met Narendra. In one of the rooms Sri Ramakrishna sat reclining against a pillow. Narendra sat at his right, I in front. He asked Narendra to talk with me. But the latter said, "I have a nasty headache today. I don't feel like talking." "Then let us postpone it," I said, "we shall have a chat some other day." And that came to pass in May or June, 1897, at Almora.

Ah! How happily I spent those few days with him! I never met him again after that. It was only the Master's wish that brought us together at Almora.

I met the Master only four or five times. But in that short time we became so intimate that I felt as if we had been classmates. How much liberty I took while speaking with him! But no sooner had I left his presence than it flashed on me, "Great God! With whom was I speaking?" My whole life has been sweetened by what I received in those few days. The memory of that Elysian smile is still with me, shedding unending bliss.

Sri Ramakrishna paid a visit to Pundit Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar. The Pundit was far-famed for his great scholarship, which justified his title of Vidyasagar, or "ocean of learning". But even greater than his scholarship was his compassion for suffering humanity. The Master had heard about Vidyasagar's rare qualities since his boyhood and was naturally attracted towards him.

In the afternoon of August 5, 1882, Sri Ramakrishna set out for the house of Vidyasagar in a carriage, with Mahendra, Bhavanath, and Hazra. Owing to the dense traffic, the carriage had to stop, when the Master observed a man in another carriage looking at his own socks with an evident satisfaction. The Master was touched and said addressing the Divine Mother, "O Mother, the man hasn't had enough of enjoyment. Do let him enjoy a little."

As he was nearing Vidyasagar's he said to himself several times, "Mother, I am going to see the Pundit; but you know, I am absolutely devoid of learning." His mood became exalted, and he expressed his dislike for worldly topics. The carriage stopped in front of Vidyasagar's house. Sri Ramakrishna alighted, supported by Bhavanath. He wore a red-bordered cloth, the skirt of which was thrown over his shoulder, and a coat which was unbuttoned. As he was going through the garden, he asked Mahendra if he should button his coat. "No, sir," replied Mahendra, "you need not do so." The party reached the first floor of the building, Mahendra introduced the Master to the Pundit, who received him cordially. The Master was in an ecstatic mood and gazed at the Pundit as though he had known him. To control his ecstasy he kept saying at short intervals, "I shall drink some water." In that state he took his seat on a bench, on which a boy was sitting. Sri Ramakrishna moved away from him saying, "Mother, this boy has great attachment to the world."

Vidyasagar ordered some drinking water, and, learning that Sri Ramakrishna has no objection to sweetmeats, brought some. Sri Ramakrishna and the devotees helped themselves. Praising a boy who sat before him, the Master said to Vidyasagar, "This is a good boy, with plenty of virtues in him—like the river Phalgu which looks like a bed of sand but when slightly dug, exposes to view a stream of water running underground."

Then he addressed Vidyasagar with a smile: "Today I am before the 'ocean'. Up to now I have seen only canals and streams, or at best rivers. But today I see the ocean."

Vidyasagar: "Then, sir, be pleased to take some salt water from it."

Sri Ramakrishna: "No, no, you are not an ocean of that

kind. You are not an ocean of Avidya (ignorance) but of Vidya (knowledge). (Laughter). You are the ocean of milk spoken of in the Puranas."

Vidyasagar: "Well, sir, you may talk as you like."

Sri Ramakrishna: "What you do is Sattvika (unselfish) work. It is the Rajasika (active) aspect of Sattva. Compassion springs from Sattva. The work that is done out of compassion is a Rajasika work no doubt, but this Rajas is the outcome of Sattva and does no harm. Shukadeva and others did not give up compassion in order to teach mankind about God. You are distributing knowledge and food; this is good. It will help you to realization if only you can do it disinterestedly. Some work for name or to acquire religious merit. The work of such is not selfless work. Besides, you are already a perfected sage (Siddha)."

Vidyasagar: "How, sir?"

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling): "Potatoes and other vegetables become soft when boiled (Siddha), and you are so tender-hearted—you are so kind!" (Laughter).

Vidyasagar: "But certain things harden when boiled, as for instance, pulse made into pulp." (Laughter).

Sri Ramakrishna: "No, no, you are not of that type. Mere scholars are like diseased fruits that will never ripen. They are lost half-way. The vulture soars very high but has its eye on a bit of carrion on the ground. Mere scholars are such only in name, for they are attached to lust and wealth—like vultures they are on the look-out for carrion. Attachment belongs to the realm of nescience (Avidya), while compassion, devotion and renunciation are the glorious offshoots of knowledge (Vidya)."

Everybody listened with rapt attention to his words. He resumed: "Brahman is beyond both Vidya and Avidya. He is beyond Maya. Brahman cannot be defined by words. The Vedas, the Puranas, the Tantras, and all the six philosophies—everything has been defiled by being uttered by the mouth. Only one thing has not been defiled. It is Brahman. No one has as yet been able to say what Brahman is."

Vidyasagar (to his friends): "Well, this is a remarkable statement. Today I have learnt something quite new."

Sri Ramakrishna: "People think they have known all about Brahman. An ant went to a sugar hill. It ate one grain and was satisfied. It took another grain in its mouth and went

home. As it went, it thought that next time it would take the whole hill away ! Men, who are but insignificant creatures, think like this. They do not know that Brahman is beyond mind and speech. However great a man may be, he can never know God. Shukadeva and others are at best only big ants that are able to take eight or ten grains in their mouths . That's all."

After remarking that the scriptures only throw out hints about Brahman, he said, "When one has Samadhi one attains the knowledge of Brahman—one realizes it. In that state reason is perfectly at rest. The man becomes silent. He has not the power to express Brahman in words. A salt doll went to fathom the sea ! (Laughter). It would report about its depth ! But that was hopeless. As soon as it touched the water, it dissolved. And who was there to report ?"

Someone asked: "Doesn't a man of realization speak again after Samadhi ?"

Sri Ramakrishna (to Vidyasagar and others): "Sankaracharya retained his purified ego in order to teach mankind. When one realizes Brahman, one is silent. Reasoning lasts only up to realization. So long as the butter has not reached the boiling point, it simmers. Reaching the boiling point, it simmers no more. But when a kneaded flour-cake is put into it, it again makes a noise ; and when the cake is fried, it is again silent. Similarly the man of realization comes down to a lower plane and talks in order to teach mankind.

"So long as the bee does not sit on the flower, it buzzes. When it has begun to sip the honey, it is quiet. Sometimes, however, after drinking its fill, it hums out of sheer joy.

"When a pitcher is dipped into a pond, it makes a gurgling noise. When full, it makes no more sound. (Laughter). But if the water is poured into another pitcher, again there is sound."

Then he explained how the man of realization sees the whole universe as composed of Brahman and nothing else, and added that all paths are true.

In the course of the conversation the Master said that the Lord has endowed different beings with different degrees of power. Vidyasagar wanted to understand this better.

Sri Ramakrishna: "As the Omnipresent Entity He is in all beings, down to the ant. But there is a difference in the manifestation of power. How else can one man defeat ten while

another flies from a single opponent ? If it were not so, why do people respect you ? Have you a pair of horns on your head ? You have compassion, you have scholarship, which others have not. Therefore people respect you and come to see you. You admit this ?”

Vidyasagar only smiled in reply.

Sri Ramakrishna: “There is nothing in mere scholarship. One reads books to ascertain the means of attaining God. What does the Gita mean ? What you get by repeating the word ten times ? If you repeat it, it becomes *gi-ta-gi-ta-gi* etc., that is, Tyagi, or a man of renunciation. The Gita teaches man to give up everything and to try to realize God. Monk or householder, everyone must give up from the mind all attachment.

“Why does a man of realization concern himself with devotion ? The answer is that the ego cannot be rooted out. It disappears when he is in Samadhi, but when he returns to normal consciousness, it reappears. You see a tiger in a dream ; when you awake, your heart still palpitates ! The whole trouble is due to the ego. A bullock cries ‘*Ham ma*’ or ‘*I*’. That’s why it suffers so. It is yoked to the plough, and is made to work in the sun and the rain. Then, perhaps, it is killed by a butcher, and out of its skin shoes are made, as well as drums, which are mercilessly beaten. Yet there is no end to his troubles, for, out of its entrails strings are made for bows for carding cotton. At last it no longer says ‘*Ham ma*’ (I), but ‘*Tu-hun*,’ ‘*Tu-hun*’ (It is ‘*Thou*’), and is free. ‘*O Lord, I am the servant, and Thou art the Master ; I am the son, and Thou art the Mother.*’

“Rama said to Hanuman, ‘In what light do you see me ?’ Hanuman replied, ‘Rama, when I have the sense of ego left in me, I see that ‘*Thou art the Whole, and I am the part ; Thou art the Master, and I am the servant ; but when I attain the highest knowledge, I see that ‘*Thou art myself, and I am ‘Thou*’.*’

“God smiles twice. Once when the physician assures the dying patient’s mother that he will cure her son. God smiles to think that the doctor says he will save him when He is going to kill him ! The physician thinks that he is the doctor—he has forgotten God. Again God smiles when two brothers divide land by throwing a rope across. He knows the whole universe belongs to Him, and yet, these people are dividing

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“God smiles twice. Once when the physician assures the dying patient’s mother that he will cure her son. God smiles to think that the doctor says he will save him when He is going to kill him ! The physician thinks that he is the doer—he has forgotten God. Again God smiles when two brothers divide land by throwing a rope across. He knows the whole universe belongs to Him, and yet, these people are dividing

the land between themselves !

"One cannot know Him through reason. Call on Him in the attitude of a servant, surrendering your all to him.

(To Vidyasagar) "Well, what is your attitude towards Him ?"

Vidyasagar smiled and said, "I shall tell you some day privately" (Laughter).

Sri Ramakrishna said smiling, "One cannot know Him through scholarship and reasoning." He then burst into a song full of enthusiasm, "Who knows how the Mother is !" After the song he said to Vidyasagar, "Did you notice ? 'The whole universe lies in the womb of the Mother.' And 'Even the six systems of philosophy cannot reach Her.' You must have faith and devotion."

He eulogized faith and said, "They say, Hanuman had so much faith in Rama's name that he could cross the ocean at a bound. But Rama himself had to build a bridge." Then he sang two fiery songs describing the efficacy of faith and devotion, in the course of which he fell into Samadhi. The Pundit and everyone witnessed this scene in silent wonder. Regaining his normal state the Master again said, "It is He who is being addressed as Mother ! The mother is our most intimate relation. One realizes God through love alone. Intense devotion, love, and faith are necessary."

He sang another song. Then he said, "Rituals such as worship and sacrifice are not needed if one has love for Him. One needs a fan so long as the wind does not blow. But one may put it aside when there is a southern breeze, for it is superfluous.

"What you are engaged in is good work. If done without an eye to results, it will conduce to devotion and love for God. By working in this way one realizes God.

"But the more devotion and love you have for Him, the more will your work decrease. The kind of work you are doing is for your own good. If you can do it without motive, your mind will be purified, you will attain love for God. And as soon as you have that, you will be able to realize Him. Man never helps the world. It is the Lord who does it. The man who works unselfishly will achieve his own well-being.

"There is gold within you, about which you as yet know

nothing. It is just under the surface. If you once get a glimpse of it, work other than reflection on the Self will automatically decrease.

"Go on ! A wood-cutter went to a forest in search of wood. A Sadhu told him to go on. He did so and found sandalwood trees. Some days passed, and he thought to himself, 'The Sadhu told me to go on, and not to stop with the sandalwood trees.' He went farther and came across a silver mine. After some days he went still farther—and found a gold mine. Farther on, he found diamonds and jewels ! He became fabulously rich.

"By doing unselfish work one gains love for God ; and gradually through His grace one attains Him. One sees God, and talks with Him, just as I am talking with you !"

The audience was spellbound. It was about 9 o'clock, and Sri Ramakrishna wanted to take leave. He addressed Vidyasagar with a smile, "Well, you evidently know all this that I have said. Only you don't recollect it all at this moment. (Laughter). In the treasure-house of King Varuna are untold riches—diamonds and jewels—but he hardly knows them."

Vidyasagar (smiling): "You may say so."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes, many a rich man does not know his servants' names. (Laughter). Of even the whereabouts of precious things in his possession."

Everyone was charmed with the conversation. Sri Ramakrishna said to Vidyasagar, "Please come once to see Rani Rasmani's garden. It is a delightful place."

Vidyasagar: "Certainly, sir. You have been so kind in coming here, and it is my duty to return the visit."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Visiting me ! Please don't mention it."

Vidyasagar: "Why do you speak like that, sir ?"

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling): "We are but fishing craft. (Laughter). We can sail in all waters—small streams as well large rivers. But you are a ship, and maybe you will run aground if you venture out !" (Laughter).

Vidyasagar only smiled. Sri Ramakrishna also was smiling. Then he said, "But even a ship may go now."

Vidyasagar: "Yes, it is the rainy season." (Laughter).

The Master stood up. Vidyasagar rose to see him off. Sri Ramakrishna silently repeated the Lord's name on his fingers in an ecstatic mood, probably for the sake of the Pundit, and

stepped into his carriage. Vidyasagar offered to pay the carriage-hire, which was thankfully declined. The party then left for Dakshineswar.

We have already seen that Keshab Chandra Sen thought it a great privilege to spend a few hours in the saintly company of Sri Ramakrishna. He often arranged for occasional steamer-trips. We shall describe one such trip. In the afternoon of October 27, 1882, Keshab was on a Ganga steamer with some of his followers. The steamer halted in front of the Dakshineswar temple and Keshab sent some of his disciples in a boat to fetch Sri Ramakrishna. The Master, with Vijay, who chanced to visit him that day, stepped into the boat. But he soon lost all sense-consciousness and was taken to the steamer with some difficulty. Keshab and others bowed to him. Being immersed in Samadhi he did not perceive it. He was conducted to a cabin and put in one of the chairs. Keshab and Vijay sat down also, while other devotees, mostly Brahmos, sat on the floor. All earnestly gazed at the Master, who was gradually coming down from his Samadhi. He was heard to talk to himself, "Mother, why hast Thou brought me here? Shall I be able to get them out of their enclosures?" Someone among the audience referred to Pavhari Baba, the saint of Ghazipur, and said that he kept in his room a photograph of Sri Ramakrishna. The Master, still unable to speak, simply smiled and pointing to his body said, "Only the outer covering!" Shortly after he said, "But there is one thing to be borne in mind. The heart of the devotee is the temple of the Lord. He is more or less manifest in all things, but specially so in the devotee's heart. A zemindar can be anywhere within his estate, but people say that he lives most in such and such a parlour. The heart of the devotee is the Lord's parlour."

"He whom the Jnanis call Brahman is addressed by the Yogis as Atman and by the devotees as Bhagavan. The same Brahmin is a priest when he worships and a cook when he works in the kitchen."

He then explained that Brahman and Shakti were one and the same thing viewed from different standpoints:

"As Jal, water and Pani. A tank has several ghats. In one of these the Hindus take water and call it Jal; in another the Mohammedans drink water; and they call it Pani; while a

third is used by Englishmen who call the same thing water. All three are the same, the difference being only in name. Some call Him Allah, some God, and others designate Him as Brahman, Kali, Rama, Hari, Jesus or Durga."

He then sang some impressive songs to the Mother. A devotee asked if one must renounce the world to attain God. Sri Ramakrishna replied that everybody need not give up the world. Let a householder fix his mind upon God. Let him do his work with one hand and touch the feet of the Lord with the other. After finishing his work, let him cling to His feet with both hands. The Master continued: "It all depends on the mind. Bondage and freedom are both in the mind. The mind will take on any hue you choose to put on it. It is like a cloth in a dyer's house—you may have it dyed red, or blue, or green, or in any other colour. One caresses his wife in one way and his child in another way. But it is with the same mind.

"I am a free soul ; there is no bondage for me either in the world or in the forest. I am the child of God—son of the King of kings. Who is there to bind me in fetters ? In case you are bitten by a snake, the venom loses its power if you resolutely repeat, 'There is no venom.' Similarly, if you say with a will, 'I am not bound, I am free,' free you shall be. Why talk of sin and hell-fire all your life ? Say once, 'I shall do no more wicked deeds,' and have faith in His holy name."

He sang feelingly a song depicting Radha's yearning for Krishna, at the end of which he said, "Whether you believe in Krishna and Radha or not, try to imitate their intense longing."

After the conversation, all partook of light refreshments. The master noticed that Keshab and Vijay, owing to their differences of opinion, were not quite at ease. He sought to reconcile them and said to Keshab, "Well, here is Vijay. Your differences are like those of Shiva and Rama. Shiva was Rama's spiritual guide. They fought but were soon reconciled and became fast friends again. But the fight between Shiva's ghosts and Rama's monkeys went on ! (Laughter). Such differences of opinion are quite common among friends. Mother and daughter often have their separate observances. The Lord Himself wills such complications so that His play may last the longer. (Laughter). Ramanuja was a Vishishtadvaitin, while his teacher was an Advaitin. They came to differ, and each tried to

oust the other. It is but natural. A friend is a friend for all that."

The steamer touched at Calcutta. The Master with some others went in a carriage to Surendra's house and thence returned to Dakshineswar.

It was on the 28th of November, 1883, that Sri Ramakrishna saw Keshab for the last time at the Lily Cottage, where he was lying seriously ill. At 5 p.m., he came with Latu, Rakhal, and a few other devotees. He heard some one say that Keshab talked with the Divine Mother and laughed and wept. The passing reference at once threw him into a deep Samadhi. When it became less intense, he began to speak, almost to himself. "There is the body, and there is the Soul. The body has had a birth and will pass away; but the Soul is immortal. Take the case of a betel-nut; when ripe, it is detached from the rind; but it is very hard to separate the two when the nut is green. One gets rid of the body-idea when one sees Him—realizes Him. Then one feels the body as distinct from the Soul.

At this moment Keshab entered the room. He was lean and thin, and advanced with great difficulty. He saluted the Master and sat on the floor with him. The Master was still in a state of divine intoxication. He began to talk of the highest knowledge which obliterates all difference, and described the identity of Brahman and Shakti. Then he said, "After realization one sees Him everywhere. He is most conspicuous in man, and among men, in pure souls—who have not the least hankering for lust and wealth."

Continuing he said, "Material prosperity has no hold on God. What does He like? Not wealth, but divine emotion, love, devotion, discrimination, renunciation, and so forth. People look upon God from their own standpoint.

(To Keshab, smiling): "There is a meaning to your illness. Many waves of divine emotion have passed through your body. One does not feel them at the time, but they react on the body later on. I have noticed the steamers passing along the Ganga, scarcely producing any perceptible change. But a short while after, the water dashes against the banks and makes a huge commotion. Sometimes it even washes away a portion of the bank.

"If an elephant enters a hut, it breaks everything to pieces.

Similar is the effect of divine emotions on the system.

"You think everything is finished, but so long as there is the least trace of malady left, He won't let you go. If you get your admission into a hospital, you cannot come away at pleasure. So long as there is even a slight residuum of the disease, the house-surgeon won't discharge you. You should have thought before getting the admission!"

Keshab highly appreciated the simile and laughed and laughed. Sri Ramakrishna continued, "Everything depends on His will. 'Thou dost Thy work, Mother, but people think they do it.'

"The gardener exposes the roots of Basra rose plants in order that they may have the advantage of the dew and flourish. The same is, perhaps, the case with you. (Laughter). Next time there will probably be a great upheaval.

"I feel most anxious whenever you fall ill. During your last illness, I used to weep towards the end of the night, and say to Mother, 'Whom shall I talk to, Mother, if something particularly evil befalls Keshab?' When I came to Calcutta I offered worship to Mother Kali, and prayed to Her that you might be cured."

Keshab's mother saluted the Master from a distance and desired his blessings for Keshab's recovery. Sri Ramakrishna replied, "Pray to the Blissful Mother, and She will remove all troubles." Then he said to Keshab gravely, "Don't be too much among the ladies. It will make your condition worse. You will be better if you hear only spiritual talk."

A few weeks later Keshab passed away. The event was a great shock to Sri Ramakrishna, who wept bitterly for his loss and could not leave his bed for three days. He afterwards said, "I felt as if one of my limbs were paralysed." From this the reader will get a glimpse of the great love he bore to Keshab.

From Keshab's house Sri Ramakrishna went to the house of another Brahmo devotee, named Jaygopal Sen. There was much instructive talk. In answer to a query the Master said: "The only way out is to retire into solitude now and then and pray to God, and try to realize Him."

Question: "Shall we give up home?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Not altogether. Whenever you get the leisure, spend a day or two in some solitary place, free from all

contact with the world. Then you must not talk on secular matters with any worldly-minded people. Either you must retire to solitude or associate with holy men."

Question: "How should we know a holy man?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "He is a holy man whose mind and soul have been given up to God. He must be a man who has renounced lust and wealth. A Sadhu never looks at a woman with a worldly eye. He always keeps away from her; and if ever he approaches her, he regards her as his mother and worships her. A Sadhu constantly thinks of God, talks of God and nothing else, and he serves all creatures, knowing the presence of God in them. These are some of the characteristics of a Sadhu."

Question: "Why is the world called Maya?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "So long as one does not realize God, one has to eliminate finite things by a process of discrimination. Those who have realized Him know that He has become the all. God is Maya and Jiva and the universe and all beings. If you separate from a Bael its shell, pulp, and seeds and somebody asks you to see how much the fruit weighs will you leave the shell and seeds out and weigh the pulp alone? Of course you will include them. Then only you will be able to say the Bael weighs so much. The shell represents the universe and the seeds, the beings in it. At the time of discrimination you call the Jivas and the universe non-Self—unreal. Only the pulp then appears as real; and the shell and the seeds as unreal. But with discrimination, all the different elements are perceived as forming one whole. One sees that the same substance that has formed the pulp has also made the shell and the seeds. By the word Bael you mean the whole fruit."

The Master returned to Dakshineswar at night.

PRANKRISHNA, ADHAR, TARAK OF BELGHARIA AND VAIKUNTIA

Prankrishna Mukherji came of a distinguished family in the Twenty-four Parganas and lived in Calcutta. He was in charge of Messrs. Mackenzie Lyall's Exchange. Though a householder, he took a great interest in Vedanta and was a sincere devotee of Sri Ramakrishna, whom he visited as often as he could. Sri Ramakrishna loved him greatly and once (April, 1882) went to his house with his devotees and celebrated a festival there. Owing to his corpulence the Master would sometimes refer to him as the "fat Brahmin".

On January 1st, 1883, Prankrishna came to Dakshineswar and took his seat near the Master on the floor. Rakhal, Narendra, and Mahendra were also present. There was a small basket of sweets at hand, from which Sri Ramakrishna took a little and remarked smiling to Prankrishna, "You see, as I take the name of the Mother, I am getting all these things to eat ! But she does not give paltry things. She gives immortal assets — knowledge, love, discrimination, renunciation "

Just then a child of six or seven entered the room. The Master was seized with a novel feeling. Like a boy he tried to conceal the basket of sweets and finally moved it to one side. In the act of protecting the sweets, he fell into Samadhi ! After a long pause he heaved a sigh and began to talk to Prankrishna: "God is not only formless, but also with form. One can see His matchless form through devotion and rapture. Mother reveals Herself variously."

Then referring to the command he had received from the Mother to remain in a devotional attitude instead of unity with the Impersonal, he said, "At times I forget this and suffer in consequence. Disregarding this injunction, I once had my teeth broken. So, unless I hear the voice from heaven or have some other realization, I will remain in a devotional attitude. What do you say to this ?"

Prankrishna: "Right, sir."

Sri Ramakrishna: "And why should I refer to you either ? Within this form (meaning himself) there is someone who is

manipulating me in this way. Sometimes I used to have divine consciousness induced in me, and I could not rest until I worshipped myself. I am the instrument, and He is the operator. Formerly I used to see divine forms with the naked eye—as I am seeing you. Now I see them in a state of trance.”

The Master sat on his bedstead, filled with divine emotion, watching Rakhal. His hair stood on end, and he fell into Samadhi.

A little while after, he came back to his normal state, and in the course of conversation said to Prankrishna and Mahendra, “Many people talk glibly about the highest knowledge, but in their everyday lives they are satisfied with the things of the lower plane.

“The nearer you come to God, the more peace you will have. Peace—peace—ineffable peace ! The nearer you are to the Ganga, the more you feel its coolness, and after a bath you are still more refreshed.

“You can’t realize Him if you have the least bit of attachment in you. A thread with ever so few ragged fibres won’t pass through the eye of a needle.”

Another day (5th April, 1884) in the course of conversation the Master spoke of his own condition: “Now I find a change is coming over me. Long ago Vaishnav Charan told me that when I would see God in man, I would have perfection in knowledge. Now I see it is He who moves in so many forms—sometimes as a pious man, sometimes as a hypocrite, and again as a wicked man. Hence I say, ‘Narayana in the pious man, Narayana in the hypocrite, Narayana in the wicked and lustful’.”

It was in the April of 1883 that Adhar Chandra Sen first came to see the Master at Dakshineswar. He was a Deputy Magistrate. A friend of his had just lost his eldest son. Adhar, who had heard of the Master and long wished to see him, brought his friend to Dakshineswar. Sri Ramakrishna was in Samadhi when they entered the room. When he came back to the normal state, he began to talk to Adhar. The latter told of his friend’s bereavement. Sri Ramakrishna sang a song about the transitoriness of life and the necessity for devotion in facing death. He then consoled the bereaved father and instructed him to surrender himself to God.

The Master called Adhar aside and said, "You are a Deputy Magistrate, but that, too, is due to the grace of God. Don't forget Him. And know one thing for certain, that everyone must pay the debt of nature. Our sojourn here is temporary. This world is the centre for our activities. We come here to work out certain things, just as people come to work in Calcutta but have their homes elsewhere.

"You must do some work as discipline, but finish it quickly. A goldsmith in smelting gold uses his bellows, his fan, and his blowing tube to kindle the fire to the right point, so that the gold may melt easily. It is not until after it is put into the mould that he stops and orders tobacco. There must be stern determination. Then only one can practise successfully. The name of God has tremendous power; it destroys ignorance.

"Always direct your mind towards God. At first you have to struggle a little; then you will enjoy your pension."

At the very first meeting Adhar was attracted to the Master. His visits to Dakshineswar became more and more frequent. In fact, he came almost every day after business hours. The Master used to visit him now and then in Calcutta, making of these visits little festivals. The Mother had shown him in a trance that Adhar's house was one of his own resorts.

One day Adhar was gloomy because Sri Ramakrishna had not visited him for a long time. He fervently prayed in his heart that he might soon grace his home with his presence. The same evening the Master appeared at his house with Ramlal, M., and one or two other devotees. He passed some time listening to Ramlal's devotional songs. After partaking of light refreshments he went on to Jadu Mallik's house.

Once Adhar failed to go to Dakshineswar for a few days. When he next made his appearance, the Master asked the cause of his absence. Adhar replied that he had to attend several meetings relating to a school and other concerns. "So you forget us altogether in attending to these things," said Sri Ramakrishna. After a brief pause he suddenly said, "Look here, these are all unreal. Your school, your meeting, and your office are transitory things. God alone is real and everything else is unreal. One should devote one's whole mind to calling upon Him." Adhar kept silent. Sri Ramakrishna continued, "All this is unreal. This body is subject to death, which may

overtake it at any moment. One must pray to God before it is too late." Adhar was penitent. After a while he said in all humility, "Sir, it is long since you have been to our house. The parlour has a musty smell about it—everything in it seems to have lost its savour." These words touched the Master deeply. He stood up suddenly and blessed Adhar and M., who was also present, touching their head and chest. Then he said with infinite tenderness in the voice, "I see you as the Lord Himself. You are my own people."

Shortly after Adhar applied for the Vice-Chairmanship of the Calcutta Municipality. He sought the help of many prominent men of Calcutta in this matter. At his request Sri Ramakrishna himself prayed to Kali, "Mother, he is Thy devotee. Let him have the post if Thou so likest." But he added in the same breath, "Isn't he foolish? Instead of praying to Thee for knowledge and devotion he runs after trifles." Adhar failed to secure the post. On his next visit to Dakshineswar the Master said to him, "Why did you go abegging of those worldly people, after your long acquaintance with us?" Adhar replied, "One living in the world cannot but do these things. And you did not dissuade me." Sri Ramakrishna then said, "Well, it is better to check the desire for enjoyment than to inflame it. After I had got into this state, they asked me to sign and receive my pay from the cashier of the Kali temple, as everybody else did. But I said, 'That is impossible. If you like, you may give it to somebody else. I do not ask for it.' I am the servant of the one Lord; whom else shall I serve? Serve one master. People hanker after a situation of fifty or a hundred rupees, and you are drawing three hundred. Yours is not an ordinary post. Why not stick to it? Isn't it annoyance to have several masters?" He went on in this strain for some time and concluded by saying that God alone is real and everything else is unreal.

The Master's frequent references to death and the transitoriness of life had a deep meaning behind them which passed unnoticed at the time. Shortly after, Adhar died as the result of a riding accident. Sri Ramakrishna had warned him about riding, but Adhar did not take these warnings seriously. His death caused great pain to the Master, who wept for him bitterly before the Divine Mother.

A young man named Tarak Nath Mukherji, from Belgharia,

often visited the Master. Though married and living as a householder, he was a noble soul and endowed with many spiritual qualities. He lived temporarily in Calcutta, whence he used to come to Dakshineswar in spite of the opposition of his family. Sri Ramakrishna loved him and assigned him to a very high place among his devotees.

One day the Master said to him, "Always be on your guard against lust and wealth. Once entangled in the meshes of lust, there is no way out for you. It is a dreadful slough. One who has fallen into it cannot get out. Come here now and then."

Tarak: "My people at home won't allow me to come."

A devotee: "If someone's mother forbids him to come to Dakshineswar and threatens to curse him if he disobeys, what is he to do?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "A mother who does this is a veritable evil genius. No blame attaches to one for disobeying such a one, for she stands in the way of God-realization. One may disobey one's superiors for the sake of God. Bharat did not listen to his mother Kaikeyi in his devotion for Rama. The Gopis went counter to their husbands in order to meet Sri Krishna. Prahlada disobeyed his father for the sake of God. Bali disregarded his Guru, Shukracharya, to please the Lord. Vibhishana set aside the words of his elder brother, Ravana, in order to realize Rama. Excepting this command to turn away from God, you must obey her in all things."

Then the Master felt the weight of Tarak's hand and said, "There is still a bit of crookedness left, but it will disappear. Pray a little to God; and come here now and then."

One day Sri Ramakrishna while in Samadhi placed his foot on the chest of Tarak—a mark of special grace. The intrinsic greatness of the boy will be apparent from the Master's following remark: "As Tarak was returning home from Dakshineswar, I noticed that something came out of this body (meaning himself) like a flame of light and followed the boy."

Vaikuntha Nath Sanyal had religious tendencies in his boyhood, but later on he became sceptical. He was fortunate, however, in meeting a real teacher of the Vedanta and was referred by him to Sri Ramakrishna.

At first he hesitated about going to Dakshineswar, but finally went with a devotee of the Master. He was profoundly im-

pressed. In the Master's presence he felt a peace and blessedness which he had never known before in his life. The oftener he went to Dakshineswar, the more he came under the divine spell of Sri Ramakrishna.

One day, pointing to a picture of Sri Gauranga's Sankirtana party that hung in his room, Sri Ramakrishna said to Vaikuntha, "See, how these people are surcharged with divine emotion !"

Vaikuntha: "But, sir, they are all vulgar people."

Sri Ramakrishna: "What do you mean? You must never say that again."

Vaikuntha: "Why, sir, I am a man of Nadia, and I know that the Vaishnavas are generally recruited from the lower classes."

Sri Ramakrishna: "You hail from Nadia ! Then I bow to you a second time.¹ Well, Ram and others call this (meaning himself) an Incarnation of God. What do you think ?"

Vaikuntha: "That is no great compliment, I should say."

Sri Ramakrishna: "You surprise me. Why do you think it is not a great compliment ?"

Vaikuntha: "Because, sir, an Incarnation is a more or less partial manifestation of God, and I look upon you as the great Shiva Himself."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Well ?"

Vaikuntha: "Yes, I think so. I cannot help it. You asked me to meditate on Shiva ; but in spite of repeated attempts I cannot do so. Whenever I sit down to meditate, your smiling face comes before me, and I cannot replace it—nor do I feel inclined to do so—with that of Shiva. Therefore I think of you as Shiva."

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling): "You astonish me. But I know that I am not equal even to a tiny hair of your body. Well, I have been very anxious about you: but today I am satisfied."

It was the boy's acceptance of him as the highest spiritual ideal that set the Master at rest. This was a common way with him of ascertaining a disciple's religious outlook.

¹ It was the Master's habit to salute a man at the very first sight.

NAG MAHASHAY AND SURESH CHANDRA DATTA

Foremost among the householder devotees of Sri Ramakrishna was Durga Charan Nag, better known as Nag Mahashay. Born in 1846 of poor parents, Durga Charan lost his mother at an early age and was brought up by his father and aunt. From his boyhood he had a passion for truth and was much liked by his companions because of his amiable disposition. The poverty of the family gave him little opportunity for a liberal education, yet he managed to attend daily a high school at Dacca, ten miles from his home. Later he studied homoeopathy and turned out a good homoeopath. But he charged no fixed fees. Whatever was given him, he accepted, if he considered that it was not too much. Often he gave money to his patients, or made loans to them which were never repaid. Sometimes he did not keep enough for his own needs. His sympathy for the poor and destitute knew no bounds, and he would cheerfully sacrifice everything he had to be of service to them. Even animals partook of his love. He purchased whole baskets of live fish to free them in the nearest tank. The cobra had no fears for him. He boldly said, "it is not the snake of the jungle that kills, but the snake of evil desire !"

He was married at an early age, but he had an instinctive horror of marital relations. On the death of his first wife, his father forced him to marry a second time ; but sex attraction had not the slightest influence over his immaculate mind. He was too fully convinced of the evanescence of the world to be lured into its meshes. He feared that, being a married man with the necessity of earning money, he would be bound to the world. His one absorbing thought was how to escape such bonds. He was told that without realization of God there was no salvation -- but how to realize Him ? He spent night after night in prayer and meditation, but with no success. Hearing one day from a monk about the need of a Guru in the religious life, he sat daily on the bank of the Ganga, praying to the Divine Mother to send him one. He eagerly watched the holy men who came to bathe in the river, hoping that someone among them might

initiate him. One morning he saw a boat approaching, and in it was the spiritual teacher of his family. In response to his inquiries as to why he was in Calcutta, the Guru replied, "I have come at the special command of the Mother to initiate you." The initiation quickened Nag Mahashay's aspirations for a religious life. By day he ministered to the sick ; but his nights were spent on the banks of the Ganga in prayer or meditation. Often he would lose outward consciousness. Though his father was much troubled about him, his sympathies were more with his young daughter-in-law. The girl, however, was not disturbed ; she knew that her husband was above all earthly attachment. Nag Mahashay said to her, "Love on the physical plane never lasts. He indeed is blessed who can give his love to God with his whole heart. Even a little attachment to the body endures for several births. So be not attached to this cage of bone and flesh. Take shelter at the feet of the Mother and think of Her alone. Thus will your life here and hereafter be ennobled."

Suresh Chandra Datta was a great friend of Nag Mahashay. They passed long hours in discussing religious topics. But mere words failed to satisfy Nag Mahashay. In bitter anguish he said to Suresh one day, "Time is wasted in mere talk ; unless something is directly perceived, life is useless."

Not long after this, he came under the holy influence of Sri Ramakrishna. His friend Suresh had heard of the sage from Keshab Chandra Sen, but said nothing of it for two months ; when at last he did so, Nag Mahashay was seized with an irresistible desire to go to see the saint at once. The following day, the friends arrived at the door of Sri Ramakrishna. A man seated before it said in response to their inquiries as to where the Paramahansa lived, "Here, but today he has gone to Chandernagore. Come some other day." Weary and downhearted, they were turning away, when they saw someone inside beckoning to them to enter. It was Sri Ramakrishna. He received them graciously and explained that Hazra told that story to keep strangers out. He then asked them to sit closer. Nag Mahashay tried to touch the Master's feet, but he drew them back. Nag Mahashay interpreted this to mean that he was not yet fit to touch them. He gazed intently at Sri Ramakrishna, who asked him, "What are you looking at ?" "I had a great

desire to see you, and now I am gratifying it," was the reply. The Master told both to go to the Panchavati and meditate. Afterwards he took them to see the temples. At about five o'clock they took their leave of the Master who said to them as they left, "Good-bye; come again. That is the only way for us to become acquainted." Until his next visit the following week Nag Mahashay was filled with a burning desire to see the Master again. When he arrived at Dakshineswar, he entered the room with such eagerness that the Master said, "You have done well to come. I was waiting for you." A little later he added, "Don't fear, my child, you have attained a very exalted state." He then asked him to prepare tobacco, and when he had left the room to do so, the Master remarked to Suresh, "Did you notice? This man is like a blazing fire!"

The next time Nag Mahashay went to Dakshineswar, he found Sri Ramakrishna alone. At the sight of him, the Master stood up in an ecstatic mood and muttering something to himself began to pace the room. Nag Mahashay was frightened. Then the Master said in his natural tone. "You are a doctor, will you see what ails my foot?" Nag Mahashay gently felt the foot, but could find nothing wrong with it. "Why don't you look more carefully," said the Master again. Then Nag Mahashay understood that his desire to touch the holy feet had been noted and that he was being given the opportunity to fulfil it. With tears of joy in his eyes he began to stroke them and touched them with his head. He used to say later on, "One did not have to ask him for anything. He understood at once one's innermost desires and fulfilled them of his own accord." Thenceforth Nag Mahashay regarded Sri Ramakrishna as his Chosen Ideal. He would say, "He himself most graciously made me know who he was. None can know or understand him without his grace." One day the Master suddenly asked him pointing to his own body, "What do you think of this?" Nag Mahashay replied with folded hands, "You cannot hoodwink me any more, divine Master. Through your grace I have come to know that you are He." Sri Ramakrishna fell into Samadhi and placed his right foot on the chest of Nag Mahashay. The latter had a vision in which he saw the whole universe floating in a limitless ocean of divine Bliss.

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and became one of the favoured disciples. But so modest was he that at first he would absent himself on Sundays or holidays, considering himself too insignificant to mingle with the great men who visited the Master on these special days. Yet later on, when they came to know him, they paid him the highest honours. He accepted without question every word that fell from the lips of Sri Ramakrishna. He would say, "Even when Sri Ramakrishna said anything in joke, it had a deep significance." One day he overheard the Master saying, "It is difficult for doctors, lawyers, and brokers to advance on the path of God." Referring to doctors in particular he said, "If the mind clings to the tiny drops of medicines, how can it conceive of the Infinite?" Nag Mahashay had been feeling that the demands of his profession were interfering with his spiritual life, but to please his father he continued to practice. These words of the Master made him decide to give up the profession. That very evening he threw his medicine-chest and medical books into the Ganga. Thenceforth he gave his entire attention to prayer and meditation. Gradually he became possessed of a strong desire to renounce the world. One day he went to Dakshineswar and begged the Master's permission to embrace the life of Sannyasa. But Sri Ramakrishna's reply was, "What harm is there in remaining as a householder? Only keep the mind fixed on God. Live as king Janaka did. Your life will be an example of how a householder should live." There was no help for it—Nag Mahashay had to continue the householder's life. He used to say, "None had the power to disregard the Master's words. He would indicate definitely the respective duties of all his devotees."

Though Nag Mahashay remained in the world, he spent most of his time in prayer and meditation. It became almost impossible for him to turn his attention to any other occupation. On his father's retirement Nag Mahashay was appointed to his place. But it was idle to expect routine work from a man who had reached the point where even food and clothing had become unimportant. One of his friends who worked in the same firm, helped him out now and then by taking over some of his duties. Noticing his stern spirit of renunciation, Sri Ramakrishna said to him another day, "Don't leave your home. You shall be provided with plain food and clothing anyhow."

Nag Mahashay: "How is it possible to live in the world? The sight of the misery of others is unbearable."

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Sri Ramakrishna: "You needn't stir out in search of them. Stay at home, and real Sadhus will come to you to pay their respects."

But no Sannyasin could lead a more austere life than he. He covered his body with a coarse cotton cloth and walked barefooted in all seasons. He took only the poorest food, without seasoning of any kind. Often he fasted for days at a time, and would say to friends who remonstrated, "If I am to think day and night of food only, when shall I think of God? Constant thought about food becomes an obsession." Even sacramental delicacies he took rarely. He used to say, "They will create a hankering for palatable things." He stifled for ever all egoistic feelings and was humble itself, considering himself the servant of everyone, however lowly. Referring to his unimpeachable purity, his wife used to say, "Taking the name of Sri Ramakrishna he trampled under foot all animal propensities. He lived in the midst of life, but was never tainted."

Suresh Chandra Datta, Nag Mahashay's friend, was born in an aristocratic family of Calcutta. He was originally a Brahmo and a follower of Keshab Chandra Sen, from whom, as already said, he heard about Sri Ramakrishna. A staunch believer in the impersonal aspect of God, he had never bowed his head before any of the Hindu deities, differing in this from his friend, Durga Charan, who was an orthodox Hindu obeying every scriptural injunction.

After his first visit to the Master, Suresh went to see him frequently. Then he was ordered to Chittagong on duty. Nag Mahashay urged him to take his initiation from the Master before his departure. Having no faith in this ceremony, he at first refused to comply. Later he agreed to have it if the Master told him to do so. Next day the two friends went to Dakshin-

and became one of the favoured disciples. But so modest was he that at first he would absent himself on Sundays or holidays, considering himself too insignificant to mingle with the great men who visited the Master on these special days. Yet later on, when they came to know him, they paid him the highest honours. He accepted without question every word that fell from the lips of Sri Ramakrishna. He would say, "Even when Sri Ramakrishna said anything in joke, it had a deep significance." One day he overheard the Master saying, "It is difficult for doctors, lawyers, and brokers to advance on the path of God." Referring to doctors in particular he said, "If the mind clings to the tiny drops of medicines, how can it conceive of the Infinite?" Nag Mahashay had been feeling that the demands of his profession were interfering with his spiritual life, but to please his father he continued to practise. These words of the Master made him decide to give up the profession. That very evening he threw his medicine-chest and medical books into the Ganga. Thenceforth he gave his entire attention to prayer and meditation. Gradually he became possessed of a strong desire to renounce the world. One day he went to Dakshineswar and begged the Master's permission to embrace the life of Sannyasa. But Sri Ramakrishna's reply was, "What harm is there in remaining as a householder? Only keep the mind fixed on God. Live as king Janaka did. Your life will be an example of how a householder should live." There was no help for it—Nag Mahashay had to continue the householder's life. He used to say, "None had the power to disregard the Master's words. He would indicate definitely the respective duties of all his devotees."

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After his first visit to the Master, Suresh went to see him frequently. Then he was ordered to Quetta on duty. Nag Mahashay urged him to take his initiation from the Master before his departure. Having no faith in this ceremony, he at first refused to comply. Later he agreed to have it if the Master told him to do so. Next day the two friends went to Dakshin-

eswar, and Nag Mahashay raised the question of initiation. Sri Ramakrishna said to Suresh, "Yes, Durga Charan is right. A man should practise religious exercises under the direction of a Guru. What prevents you from admitting this?" "Sir, I have no faith in Mantras," replied Suresh. "All right," said the Master, "don't worry about it now. Everything will come in time." Suresh left for Quetta. Some time after, he felt a great hankering for initiation and came back to Calcutta to ask Sri Ramakrishna to become his spiritual guide. But it was too late; and he had no further opportunity of approaching the Master with his request.¹

GIRISH CHANDRA GHOSH

The name of Girish Chandra Ghosh is a household word in Bengal as the greatest dramatist in the Bengali language and the father of the Bengali stage. He was a very dissipated man, due in part to the social conditions of his time. He was one of the first of the cultured people in Bengal to feel the impact of Western education with its strong materialistic bias. Everything that was Western was accepted without question simply because it was Western and new. Unfortunately it was easier for some to imitate the vices of the West such as drinking, than its virtues. There were others who lost all reverence for the old Hinduism and became Christians or Brahmos. The situation among the orthodox Hindus was no better, because of their differences of opinion. The priests, the custodians of the ancient spiritual culture, had become degenerated and hypocritical. These conflicting conditions produced great confusion in Girish's mind. His faith in the old was gone; and being dissatisfied with the new, he plunged himself into all sorts of dissipations in order to stifle the question that was always in his mind, "Does God exist; and if He does, how can I attain Him?" "The necessities for the physical life are present in abundance everywhere," he would say to himself, "why then must one labour to acquire the necessities for the spiritual life? Why shouldn't they too be right at hand? The whole thing is a fraud. The materialists are wiser. Their view is right, because at least they get some fun out of life." For fourteen years he tried to live up to this conclusion.

Then came a series of reverses which upset him. He was frantic in his efforts to find some way out of his difficulties. He bethought himself of taking refuge with the Lord Shiva of Tarakeswar to whom the afflicted go for the cure of disease. "I also am hopelessly beset with dangers," he thought, "can He not help me? Let me try." He tried to surrender himself to the Lord. The attempt was successful. The dangers passed quickly. Girish was convinced that God was real. He was free from danger, but what about the other world? He was in grave doubt as to which path to follow. He said to himself, "I have

experienced the glories of Taraknath. Let me call on Him." Gradually his faith in the deities returned. "But people say," he again thought, "it is the Guru who shows the way. Well, can I not find the way through the Lord's name? But everyone says that the Guru is indispensable. Well, whom should I accept as such? And if, as it is said, the Guru should be regarded as God Himself, how can I think of a man like myself as God?" He again became restless. He could never bow to a human Guru. Then he said to himself, "Never mind. I won't look for a Guru. But I can pray to Taraknath that in case I need one, He may graciously act in that capacity for me. I shall take His name once every morning and wait for further developments."

One day Girish read in the *Indian Mirror* that a Paramahansa lived at Dakshineswar and that Keshab Chandra Sen with his disciples paid frequent visits to him. Girish, seeing that the Brahmos had taken to saying "Hari" or "Mother", thought they might set up a Paramahansa as well, far as he might be from the true Paramahansas of ancient times. Shortly after, he heard that the Paramahansa was visiting a neighbour. Out of curiosity he went to see him. It was evening and the lamps were lit. But Sri Ramakrishna, who was then in a semi-conscious state, did not see the light. He inquired if it was evening. Girish thought this the height of absurdity, and left in disgust.

Some years after this, Sri Ramakrishna paid a visit to the house of Balaram Bose. Girish was invited also. He found the room crowded. He was agreeably surprised at the conduct of Sri Ramakrishna. He was under the impression that Paramahansas and Yogis never spoke, never bowed to any one, but if hard pressed, condescended to accept some little personal service. But this Paramahansa behaved quite differently. Girish sat for a few minutes, when Babu Shishir Kumar Ghosh, editor of the *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, who also was present there but did not seem to have much respect for Sri Ramakrishna, said to Girish, "Well, let us go. We have had enough of this." Girish wanted to stay, but had to comply with his friend's request. This was his second visit.

Some days passed. Girish's *Chaitanya Lila* was being played at the Star Theatre (then on Beadon Street), and he was pacing the courtyard of the theatre, when a devotee of Sri Ramakrishna came to him and said, "Paramahansa Deva has come to see the

play. Will you kindly give him a seat, or shall we purchase a ticket?" "He will be admitted free," replied Girish, "but others will have to pay." He was about to advance and receive the Master, when he found that he was already within the compound. Sri Ramakrishna saluted Girish; Girish returned the salute, but the Master bowed again. This was repeated again. Girish stopped short lest the salutations go on for ever. He conducted the Master to a box, engaged a servant to fan him, and feeling indisposed, went home. This was his third meeting with the Master.

About this time he met a Vaishnava painter, who told him that every day he offered food to his Chosen Deity, who actually partook of it. But, he added, none could experience such divine favour without the grace of a Guru. The statement, whether true or false, profoundly impressed Girish. He shut himself in his room and wept bitterly.

Three days after the above incident, Girish saw Sri Ramakrishna accompanied by two or three devotees walking slowly past his house. As soon as he saw Girish, the Master saluted him. Girish returned the salute, and the Master went on his way. Girish felt himself so much drawn to him that he longed to run and overtake him. Just then came a message from the Master, asking Girish to come to see him. Girish followed the messenger to Balaram's house, arriving just after the Master. Girish asked him, "Who is a Guru?" "He is an intermediary," replied the Master, "he brings about the meeting of the devotee with God." Then he added, "You have your Guru." "What is a Mantra?" again asked Girish. "God's name," was the answer. He illustrated it by a reference to Kabir who wanted to make Ramananda his Guru. But the monk, for some reason, refused to initiate him. Ramananda used to bathe very early in the Ganga. One day Kabir lay on the steps of the bathing ghat. In the dark Ramananda's feet touched the prostrate body of Kabir. The monk at once took the name Rama, for he looked upon every creature as the manifestation of the Lord. Kabir accepted that word as his Mantra and attained perfection by repeating it. The conversation drifted to theatres, and Sri Ramakrishna said, "Let me visit your theatre again."

Girish: "Very well; you may come any day."

Sri Ramakrishna: "But please accept some fee."

Girish: "All right, you may pay eight annas."

Sri Ramakrishna: "But that will not purchase a good seat."

Girish: "You may occupy a box, as on the previous occasion."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Well, you must take one rupee."

Girish agreed, and there the matter was settled. Balaram had some sweets served to the Master, who took a little, and the rest was distributed among the devotees. Girish wanted some, but dared not lest some one should criticize him. Shortly after he saluted the Master and left with a devotee. The latter asked Girish, "How did you find him?" "A great devotee," answered Girish. He was full of joy. There was no despondency now over not having a Guru. He said to himself, "It is fools who say that we must have a Guru. Hasn't the Paramahansa just said that I have my Guru? I am not going to listen to anybody else."

It was arrogance that made Girish refuse to accept a Guru. He considered it bondage to owe allegiance to a mere man. But this haughtiness gave way before the magic influence of Sri Ramakrishna, for it was he who had done the bowing, not Girish. Before this utter absence of egoism the proud head of Girish bent of itself. Another day, some time after his last meeting with the Master, Girish was seated in the green-room of his theatre, when a devotee, Devendra Nath Mazumdar, came to him in haste and said that Sri Ramakrishna had come to see the play. "Very well," replied Girish, "please conduct him to a box." "But won't you come and receive him?" he asked. "Why," said Girish, "can't he get down from the coach without me?" But he went nevertheless and found Sri Ramakrishna just about to alight. As he looked upon his serene countenance, Girish was smitten with remorse to think that he had not been more cordial in welcoming the saint. He took the Master upstairs, touched his feet without knowing why he did so, and presented him with a rose. The Master returned it saying, "Flowers are for gods or for fashionable folk; I am neither."

Girish conducted the Master and the devotees to a special room. Sri Ramakrishna sat on a chair and Girish on another. There were other chairs in the room, which Girish repeatedly asked the devotees to take, but they preferred to stand. Referring to this incident later Girish said, "I was too stupid to know

that disciples should not sit on the same level with the Guru." The Master said to him, "There is crookedness in your mind."

Girish knew that he had many failings, but he did not know which one was meant. He asked, "How can I get rid of it?" "Have faith," was the reply.

Some days elapsed. One afternoon, at his theatre, Girish received a note saying that Sri Ramakrishna was to visit Ramchandra Datta that evening. Immediately he felt a great longing to see the Master, but hesitated because he had not been invited. The strange attraction, however, drew him on. He stopped several times on the way, but at length reached his destination.

It was evening. Sri Ramakrishna was dancing and singing with his devotees. Tears stood in Girish's eyes at the sight of such fervour and enthusiasm. In the course of the dance the Master plunged into Samadhi, and the devotees began to take the dust of his feet. Girish would have liked to have done this as well, but false pride checked him. He was not going to leave himself open to ridicule. Curiously enough, the moment such thoughts crossed his mind, the Master came out of his Samadhi, and dancing towards Girish fell into Samadhi again before him.

After the singing was over Sri Ramakrishna went into the parlour, where Girish followed him. Girish asked, "Sir, will the crookedness of my mind ever be removed?" "Yes," replied Sri Ramakrishna. Thrice the question was repeated, and thrice the Master gave the same answer. Among the audience was Manomohan Mitra, who said, "You have been answered. Why be so troublesome?" Pocketing this affront Girish thought, "He is right. If a man cannot take another's word the first time, a hundred repetitions will not make him do so." He saluted the Master and returned to his theatre.

Some days after the above incident, Girish went to Dakshineswar and found Sri Ramakrishna seated on a blanket on the southern verandah of his room, talking with Bhavanath. Girish silently repeated the Mantra, "Guru is Brahma," etc., and saluted the Master. Sri Ramakrishna asked him to be seated and said, "Would you believe me, I was just speaking of you. You may ask him (pointing to Bhavanath)" Then he proceeded to instruct him. Girish interrupted, "I don't want to listen to instructions. I myself have written many such. It is of no use.

Please help me in a more tangible way if you can." This pleased the Master, who asked Ramlal to repeat a particular Sanskrit verse, the purport of which was that even if he dwells in solitude or a mountain cave, a man without faith can achieve nothing. Girish felt pure for the time being. Who might this man be, he thought, who could make his proud head bow before him in veneration? Who was this remarkable personality at whose feet he had taken shelter and lost all fear? He asked eagerly, "Who are you, sir?" The Master replied, "Some say that I am Ramprasad, others that I am Raja Ramakrishna." As the Master walked with him to the northern verandah Girish asked, "Sir, now that I have seen you, shall I continue to do as I am doing?" "Why, yes," replied Sri Ramakrishna. Girish felt from this that his connection with the theatre was not harmful. Already he was beginning to glimpse what a Guru really meant.

Girish became a steadfast devotee of Sri Ramakrishna. The Master used to speak highly of his faith, which changed his evil propensities into noble attributes. Wonderful was his relationship with the Master! Shortcomings which would never be tolerated in others were patiently borne with in Girish. The Master knew that at heart Girish was tender, faithful, and sincere. One of the vices of Girish was his inordinate intemperance. One day, under its influence, he abused Sri Ramakrishna in the theatre, mortifying his devotees. The reason of the outburst was this: He desired to come into closer relationship with the Master, to have the Master become to him as a son. He thought that by doing so he might develop the devotional element which he felt to be lacking in his nature. But Sri Ramakrishna would not listen. He said spiritedly, "Why should I be your son? My father was a pure and pious man. I shall be your Guru, your Ishta." This loosed the tongue of Girish.

Shortly after, when Ramchandra went to Dakshineswar, the Master said to him, "Girish has abused me for nothing."

Ram: "You will have to bear with it."

Sri Ramakrishna: "But if he should beat me some time?"

Ram: "You will have to put up with that as well. He can only give what he has. What could the snake¹ Kaliya offer to Krishna but its venom? So it is with Girish. Who but you

¹ This refers to an episode in the Book X of the *Bhagavata*.

would tolerate such treatment?"

Sri Ramakrishna was visibly moved. "Get me a coach," said he, "I shall go and see Girish immediately." He did not listen to the objections of the devotees, nor did he mind the midday sun. When he reached the house of Girish, he found him smitten with anguish and remorse. The Master's kind and affectionate words banished his gloom. The evening was spent in song and dance, and Girish made a long stride towards complete self-surrender at the Master's feet.

One day a devotee complained to Sri Ramakrishna about the intemperance of Girish and begged him to advise him to give up liquor. Sri Ramakrishna sternly replied, "Why do you trouble your head about him? He who has taken charge of him will look after him. Girish is a devotee of the heroic type. I tell you, drinking will not affect him."

The Master knew that mere words could not induce a man to break deep-rooted habits. But the silent influence of his love worked miracles. Girish tried his best to conquer his love of drink, and succeeded to a certain extent. One day, however, he went to see an actress who was ill, and drank so much that he had to spend the night at her house. It was the first time he had ever slept in such a place. In the morning, when he had sobered up, he understood what had happened, and stung with remorse, started directly for Dakshineswar, not however without a flask of wine. Dismounting from the coach, he ran to the Master and clasping his feet, began to weep. In the mean time, Sri Ramakrishna told a devotee to take Girish's shoes, scarf, and flask from the coach. When Girish became calmer he felt a desire for a drink, and was much disturbed when he found that the carriage in which he had left the flask was gone. But the Master produced the flask, and Girish drank before all. When he realized what he had done, he was much ashamed. Sri Ramakrishna only said, "All right, enjoy yourself to your fill, it won't be for long." He knew that Girish would soon be purged of all dross. After this incident the latter seldom touched liquor.

One day, in the course of conversation, Sri Ramakrishna said to Girish that along with his work he must remember God at least in the morning and evening. He looked at Girish as if expecting a reply. "That is a very simple thing to do," Girish thought, "but I am a busy man with no fixed hours for food

or sleep. I shall surely forget to remember God at those stated hours. So how can I promise that?" Sri Ramakrishna read his mind and said, "All right, if you cannot do that, remember God before meals and at bedtime." Girish was not willing to promise even that—such was the irregularity of his life; and besides, he was by nature opposed to any hard and fast rule—the slightest restraint was galling to him. Sri Ramakrishna realized his perplexity and said finally, "So you are unwilling to agree to this even. All right, give me your power of attorney. Henceforth I assume responsibility for you. You need not do anything." The Master was in one of his exalted moods when he said these words.

Girish heaved a sigh of relief. Now he had just what he had wanted. He was overwhelmed by the infinite love and compassion of the Master which freed him from the tasks of atoning for his past sins and preparing for a future life. He said to himself, "Ah, now I am saved. I shall now be free as air, and my bark will be guided to the haven of peace by his infinite power." He did not see at first that he had given up his freedom and made of himself Sri Ramakrishna's captive. The fact that he had to relinquish all personal initiative and submit to the will of the Master in everything, was not evident at once. His only thought was that his teacher had taken entire charge of him.

Sri Ramakrishna's training of Girish henceforth was in accordance with this new attitude. One day Girish said about some trifling matter, "Yes, I shall do this." "No, no," corrected the Master, "You must not speak in this dogmatic way. Suppose you fail to do it? Say, 'God willing, I shall do it'." Girish understood. Thenceforth he tried to give up all idea of personal responsibility and to become a willing instrument of the Divine Will. Naturally his mind constantly dwelt on Sri Ramakrishna. This unconscious meditation in time chastened his turbulent spirit.

THE MARCH OF EVENTS

In January, 1884, the Master was walking alone in the garden at Dushineswar, when he went into a trance. There was none to support him or to guide his footsteps, and he fell dislocating one of the bones of his left arm. Medical aid was sought, and the disciples were all very anxious until he recovered. The pain at times was very acute. At one time he would make light of it, at another he would go into Samadhi and lose all consciousness of the body and its pains. We describe here the incidents of one day, the 2nd of February 1884. The Master was seated on his cot, and Rakhal, Mahima Charan, Hazra, and others were in the room. Mahendra entered and saluted the Master.

Sri Ramkrishna: "I heard you were ill. You are now better, I hope?"

Mahendra: "Yes, sir."

Sri Ramkrishna (to Mahima): "Well, 'I am the instrument, and Thou art the operator'—How then did this accident take place?"

Mahima Charan made no reply. After some time the Master felt hungry and asked Mahendra to show what he had brought for him. Suddenly at the sight of Rakhal he went into Samadhi.

The trance broke. To compose himself the Master said a few times, "I shall have some sweets, I shall drink water."

Again like a boy he was appealing to the Mother with tears. "Mother Divine, why didst Thou do this with me? Oh, my hand is aching so much." (To the devotees present) "Shall I ever get well?" The devotees consoled him like a child saying, "Certainly."

Sri Ramkrishna (to Rakhal): "Though you are here as a bodyguard you are not to blame. Even you could not have saved me."

The Master was again in an exalted mood. He kept repeating, "Om, Om, Om! Mother, is it I who am speaking? Don't take away my senses, Mother, by giving me Knowledge of Brahman—don't give me Brahma-juana, Mother. Am I not your child, and naturally timid? I must have my Mother."

I bow to Brahma-Jnana a million times. Give it to those who want it. Thou Blissful Mother ! O Thou Blissful Mother !”

He wept aloud as he uttered this. Then quoting from a song of Ramprasad he sang: “Ah, that’s why I grieve. Thou art with me, Mother, and I am wide awake, but still I have been hoodwinked !”

He addressed the Mother again, “Did I do anything wrong, Mother ? Do I ever do anything ? Isn’t it Thou who dost all ? I am the instrument, and Thou art the operator.”

He was again smiling and talking—just as a boy, in spite of serious illness, is sometimes jolly and plays. He said to Mahima and others, “Unless you realize the Lord, you get nothing.” He went on to say that one must have intense yearning for God. He said, “Since He is our parent, we have a legitimate share in His house. God is our own Father, our own Mother, and we can always use force with Him, ‘Reveal Thyself, or I will commit suicide !’

“I used to call on the Mother thus: ‘Mother, O Thou Blissful Mother, Thou must reveal Thyself to me.’ Sometimes I would say, ‘O Thou Lord of the miserable, Thou Lord of the universe, I am not surely outside the universe. I am without knowledge, without spiritual practice, without devotion—I know nothing,—come to me, my Lord, out of Thy sheer grace !’”

The Master’s tone was plaintive ; the devotees were deeply moved, and Mahima Charan was weeping. Looking at the latter the Master quoted Ramprasad:

“Call on the Mother with real yearning, and She cannot stay away !”

Some devotees came from Sibpur. As they had come such a distance, the Master spoke with them, exhorting them to seek God first—to pray to Him wholeheartedly, for a few seconds at least, morning and evening. He told them that until one was satiated with enjoyment of the world, one could not get yearning for God.

About five o’clock Dr. Madhusudan came to bandage the Master’s arm. Sri Ramakrishna was smiling like a boy, and punning on the doctor’s name said, “Madhusudan is the refuge, here and hereafter. Isn’t that so ?”

Doctor: “Ah, I am only burdened with a name.”

Sri Ramakrishna: "Why, you must not minimise the value of a name. The Lord and His name are identical. When Satyabhama (Sri Krishna's queen) weighed the Lord, putting Him in one scale and a heap of gold and jewellery in the other, the latter was not sufficient. But when Rukmini (another queen) put a Tulasi leaf with the name of Krishna on it in the other scale, it balanced the Lord."

In order that the doctor might bandage the arm, a bed was spread on the floor, and Sri Ramakrishna lay on it. He sang a song of Radha's bereavement—"Radha is in her last (death-like) stage. Ah, says Vrinda, what else is in store for her?" After the dressing was over, the Master said, "I have not much faith in the Calcutta physicians. Shambhu (Mallik) was delirious. But the attending physician said, 'It is nothing. It is due to the action of the drug.' Shortly after Shambhu died!"

The evening service was over in the temples. Adhar came and saluted the Master.

Adhar: "How are you, sir?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "See—how the hand was hurt! (Smiling) Don't ask about my health!"

He asked Adhar to massage his feet lightly. Then he began to talk with Mahima Charan.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Mahima): "Devotion for devotion's sake—if you can do this, it will be well. 'I don't want liberation, fame, riches, or recovery from sickness, nothing, I only want Thee'—this is called devotion for devotion's sake. A rich man has many visitors who come to him with definite personal motives. But if there is one among them who wants nothing but comes out of love, the rich man, gradually grows to love him. Prahlada had this kind of devotion—pure love for God, without any motive."

Mahima Charan was silent. The Master then said, "All right. Let me talk of something that will be to your liking." He then spoke on Vedanta and asked Mahima to recite some hymns. Mahima quoted from the *Uttara Gita*: "The twice-born worship God in the fire, the sages in their own heart, the ignorant in images, and the even-minded everywhere."

When the Master heard the last line of the stanza, he suddenly stood up and went into Samadhi! After some time he came back to normal and seated himself. Then he asked Mahima

to recite Narada's beautiful lines in which devotion was made to be the ultimate object. After this Mahima gave Shankara's Six Stanzas on Nirvana the burden of which was: "I am Knowledge and Bliss Absolute, I am Shiva, I am Shiva." Every time Mahima quoted this last line, Sri Ramakrishna said smiling, "Not I, not I, but Thou, Thou art Knowledge and Bliss Absolute!"

Referring to this day's incident the Master said soon after to some of his disciples, "Mother has put me in such a state that I can conceal nothing. It is the state of a child. Rakhal does not fully understand that. Lest anybody should know that my arm is broken and speak ill of me, he covers it. He called Dr. Madhusudan aside to tell him all about the case. At this I shouted, 'Well, Madhusudan, come and see—I have broken my arm!'"

The injured arm took several months to heal. But the flow of the Master's spiritual discourses and the joy in the minds of his devotees continued unabated. He was almost recovered by May.

The devotees used to celebrate the Master's birthday every year. But this year, owing to the accident, the celebration was postponed till the 25th of May. They used to dress him in an ochre cloth, put garlands about his neck and offer flowers and sandal-paste at his feet—all this in accordance with the prevailing custom of worshipping the Guru. Devotional music was played throughout the day, and the Master would give his usual talks and occasionally fall into trances. The devotees brought him various delicacies, and ate what was left. The whole day and part of the evening were passed in this way; the devotees after being blessed by the Master generally dispersed at night.

During this year we have on record that the Master visited the Star Theatre twice—once on September 21st, to see the "Life of Sri Chaitanya", and again on December 14th to witness the "Life of Prahlada". The Star Theatre was then in Beadon Street, Calcutta. On the first occasion a devotee named Mahendra Nath Mukherjee brought the Master in his carriage from Dakshineswar. The Manager, Girish Chandra Ghosh, received him and seated him in a box. Baburam, M. and one or two others were present. The Master enjoyed the perform-

ance and shed tears or fell into Samadhi whenever he heard an appealing song or dialogue. He had cautioned the devotees in advance to be quiet when he was in Samadhi, lest outsiders should think that he was shamming. Now and then he made approving comments on particular episodes. A young man of Nityananda's line, from Khardah, came and stood behind the Master. Sri Ramakrishna was much pleased to see him, asked him to sit down and treated him very cordially. After he had gone, the Master said to his devotees, "He is a scholar, and his father is a great devotee. When I went to see Shyamsundar at Khardah, the father brought for me that Prasad which a hundred rupees would not have procured. The young man shows signs of spirituality. A slight stimulation will awake him spiritually. His presence almost threw me into a trance."

The play was over. Sri Ramakrishna stepped into the coach, and in answer to a query said smilingly, "I found the representation as real as the original scene." On the way he kept saying to himself in an exalted mood, "O Krishna ! Krishna that is knowledge, Krishna that is life, Krishna that is the mind, Krishna that is the Soul, Krishna that is the body !" And again, "Govinda, my life, my Soul !"

In his mill at Baghbazar, Mukherjee entertained the Master with refreshments, after which the latter left for Dakshineswar.

On the second occasion Baburam, M., and others accompanied the Master. Before the opening of the play, Girish Chandra had a little talk with him.

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling): "Well, you have written fine things !"

Girish: "Sir, I haven't assimilated the ideas. I only wrote about them. That's all."

Sri Ramakrishna: "No, you have assimilated them. Didn't I tell you the other day, unless one has devotion at heart, one cannot portray gods and goddesses ?"

Girish: "I sometimes think of giving up this theatrical business. I have had enough of it already."

Sri Ramakrishna: "No, no. Let it be. It will be a source of education to many."

The performance commenced. The child Prahlada came to school. At the very sight of him the Master uttered "Prahlada ! Prahlada !" and entered into Samadhi ! Seeing the boy under

the elephant's feet, and again in the midst of flames, he wept. The scene of the anxiety of Narayana and Lakshmi for Prahlada put the Master again into Samadhi.

After the performance, Girish asked him if he would like to see a farce that was to follow. The Master said, "No, what's all this after the 'Life of Prahlada' ! I said to Gopal Uria's¹ troupe that they should conclude their performance with some spiritual topic. The introduction of worldly topics at the end mars the whole effect of the religious piece that has gone before."

Asked by Girish how he enjoyed the play, the Master said, "I saw that He Himself had become all. The actresses seemed like visible forms of the Divine Mother. Those who played the role of the cowherds of Goloka (the Lord's abode), I found to be Narayana Himself. He Himself had become all these."

While the Master was having an interesting discourse with Girish in his private room, some one came and asked if he would like to see the farce, which had commenced. Sri Ramakrishna said to Girish, "What's this that you have done ! It is like beginning with sweets and ending with bitters."

After the play, the actresses, under instructions from Girish, came to salute the Master. Some of them even touched his feet. The Master did not object, but only said, with great tenderness in the voice, "That will do, mother, that will do !"

After they had gone, he remarked to the devotees, "He is all, in different forms !"

The Master rose. Girish and others saw him off. As soon as he was in the carriage, he went into Samadhi.

Mention has already been made of the sudden fits of ravenous hunger to which the Master was subject in an earlier period of his life. These were frequent later at Dakshineswar. Brought on by certain exalted moods, they produced no bad effects in the way of indigestion. We may mention two instances here.

One day several ladies came to see him while he was visiting Mahendra in Calcutta. One of them had brought a large quantity of some milk preparation as a present for the Master. This they left with Ramlal, and went to Mahendra's house in Calcutta to see him. Sri Ramakrishna returned to Dakshineswar at half past ten. A little later he felt very hungry and asked

¹ A popular Yatra-wala (manager of an itinerant theatrical troupe).

Ramlal for some food. The latter produced the milk preparation, and the Master ate nearly the whole of it. The next day, when the particular lady came again to Dakshineswar, he said, "Well, I ate almost the whole of your present, and had no trouble in consequence."

Another time at midnight the Master awoke and told Ramlal that he was exceedingly hungry. It so happened that on this particular occasion there were no sweets in the house. So Ramlal informed the Holy Mother at the concert-room, who with the help of some women devotees quickly prepared a large quantity of Halua, and sent it through one of the women. When she reached the Master's room, she found him pacing gravely to and fro in an exalted mood. A lamp was burning dimly, and only Ramlal was there. Owing to the accession of divine fervour, the Master appeared much larger in stature than usual and seemed scarcely of this earth. With a sense of awe, she placed the food before a carpet upon which the Master was to sit. Sri Ramakrishna sat down, and in that semi-conscious state he ate all the food. Seeing that she was gazing at him, and reading her mind he asked, "Who do you think is eating? I or some one else?" She replied, "It seems as if some one else were within you and it is he who is eating." "Rightly said," replied Sri Ramakrishna smiling.

In fact, divine ecstasy produced in the Master strange results. Sometimes it expressed itself as a total lack of control over the body, so that he reeled and tottered as he walked, like a man under the influence of liquor. It was often mistaken for actual drunkenness. One day, as the Master was walking to Ram Babu's house, he was overcome by some divine idea; his gait became so unsteady, that he had to be supported by two devotees. Some bystanders, who did not know the Master, remarked in an audible whisper, "How dreadfully drunk he is!" Some of the devotees caught the words and said to themselves, "Yes, indeed!"

Another day, at Dakshineswar, the Master went to the Kali temple and returned from it in a state of ecstasy, with flushed face and tottering steps. Meeting the Holy Mother he asked her, "Well, am I drunk?" "Certainly not," replied the Holy Mother. "Then why do I behave like this?" asked the Master again. The Holy Mother answered, "You have but tasted the

bliss of the Divine Mother !” “Well said,” he replied, much pleased.

On another occasion, in a carriage on the way to Jadu Mallik’s Calcutta house, with Latu and two other devotees, his eyes suddenly fell upon a tavern by the road side, where a number of customers were making themselves merry over the wine-bottle. The scene at once suggested to him to Divine Mother, the Fountain-head of Bliss. Forgetting where he was, he stood up, half leaning out of the carriage, and cheered the group exclaiming “Bravo ! Excellent !” For the time being he seemed to be one of them ! One of the devotees, fearing that he might fall, was about to catch hold of him, when Latu stopped him saying that the Master would check himself of his own accord. Presently the tavern was left behind, and the Master was soon himself again.

Between the years 1882 and 1884 we find Sri Ramakrishna paying two visits to the Brahmo Samaj at Sinthi and another to the Brahmo Samaj at Nandan Bagan, both places in the vicinity of Calcutta. The first of the visits to Sinthi was to Benimadhav Pal’s garden-house on the occasion of the half-yearly celebration of the Samaj. Pundit Shivanath Shastri was present. The Master accosted him with the words, “Ah, Shivanath, here you are ! Well, you are devotees, and I am glad to see you. A habitual smoker of hemp heartily welcomes another hemp-smoker. Perhaps he embraces him !” Then he treated the audience to a spiritual discourse of absorbing interest, after which there was a Sankirtana. The devotees sang and danced encircling Sri Ramakrishna, who joined enthusiastically in it. At the end of the Sankirtana the Master saluted the Divine Mother, touching the ground with his forehead and said, “*Bhagavata*, Bhakta, Bhagavan ! Salutation to the Jnani and to the Bhakta, to the Bhakta who believes in Divine forms as well as to him who believes in His Impersonal aspect ! Salutation to the Brahmajnanis of ancient times and to those of the Brahmo Samaj of today !”

Benimadhav entertained Sri Ramakrishna and the assembled devotees with a sumptuous repast.

The Master’s second visit to this Samaj was in October, 1884. In the assemblage there were Vijay, Trailokya, and a Brahmo Sub-judge. Trailokya’s songs threw the Master repeated-

ly into Samadhi. The Master had a very interesting conversation with the Sub-judge, which we reproduce in part.

Sub-judge: "We are householders; how long should we attend to our duties?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "You must bring up your children, maintain your wife and make provision for her maintenance after you are gone. If you don't do this, you are cruel; and man who has no compassion is not worth the name of man."

Sub-judge: "How long should we maintain our children?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Until they attain majority. When the young bird is sufficiently grown up, the mother pecks at it and forces it to leave nest."

Sub-judge: "What are our duties to our wives?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "In your lifetime you must give her religious instructions, and maintain her. If she is faithful, you must make provision for her maintenance after your death. But when one is mad for realization, duties cease; in that case the Lord takes care of the family. When a zemindar dies leaving a minor son, the Court of Wards takes charge of that boy. These are legal matters, which must be familiar to you."

Trailokya: "Sir, can a man have real knowledge while leading a householder's life? Can he realize God?"

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling): "Why, you have harmonized both, haven't you? Though you are in the world, yet you think of God. It is certainly possible to have realization as a householder. When the very name of God brings tears to your eyes and makes your hair stand on end, know that the attachment to lust and gold is gone, and you have realized God. If a match is dry, it ignities at a single stroke. But if it is damp, even fifty of them won't light—they are only wasted."

A devotee: "Sir, shall a man be reborn if he fails to reflect on God at the time of death, even though he has often thought much of Him during his lifetime?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Men think of God, but have no faith. They forget Him and become attached to the world. As an elephant after it has taken a bath throws dust over its body, so it is with the mind and the world. But if just after the washing the elephant is put into its stable, it has no opportunity to become dirty again. Similarly, if a man reflects on God at the time of death, his mind is purified, and there is no further

chance to be contaminated by lust and wealth."

The discourse was followed by a religious song in which the Master took part. Vijay then conducted the prayer, after which Sri Ramakrishna and the devotees had refreshments. Then the Master talked with Vijay about harmony of all religions and the efficacy of prayer. It was past ten when he set out to return to Dakshineswar.

The Nandan Bagan Brahmo Samaj was situated at the late Kashishwar Mitra's house. His sons, continuing the practice of their father, had a celebration in May, 1884, and invited Sri Ramakrishna to it. Rakhal, Mahendra, and others accompanied the Master.

Questioned by a Brahmo devotee as to the best way of controlling the passions, Sri Ramakrishna said, "Turn the course of the passions towards God. For instance, have the desire of union with the Self. Be angry with those that stand in the way of God. Cultivate the hankering to realize him. If you have to talk of 'me and mine', do so only with God, refer to Him as 'My Krishna', or 'My Rama.' If you will be proud, be proud like Vibhishana who said, 'I have bent this head before Rama, and I won't bend it before anybody else!'"

The devotee: "If He is causing everything to be done, how are we responsible for our sins?"

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling): "Duryodhana also said the same thing: 'Thou, O Krishna, art seated in the heart, and as Thou directest, so I act.' Well, he who sincerely believes that God and not he himself is the agent, cannot sin. A skilled dancer never makes a false step. But until the heart is purified, one can't even believe that God exists!"

The proceedings were over at about nine o'clock, and the Master was anxious to return home. But the hosts were too busy with their householder guests to pay any attention to Sri Ramakrishna. He said to Rakhal in fun, "Well, where's the supper?"

Rakhal (indignantly): "Sir, let us go back to Dakshineswar."

Sri Ramakrishna (amused at Rakhal's seriousness): "Wait, who will pay the carriage-hire? And where shall we sup at."

¹When one invites a holy man with his disciples, one is expected to pay for the carriage.

this hour ?”

After a long interval the call to supper came. All went upstairs in a body, and Sri Ramakrishna with Rakhal and others had to force his way through the crowd. There was no place for them to sit. With great difficulty a seat—not very clean—was found for the Master. A curry was served which Sri Ramakrishna would not touch because he felt the impurity of the person who was serving. He ate a few Puris with salt and a little sweet.

When the Master got into his carriage it was discovered that the carriage-hire had not been paid. Knowing that the hosts were young, and that any discourtesy on their part was due to inexperience, he sent some of his disciples to them for the money. Sri Ramakrishna afterwards spoke in fun of this incident to his devotees: “When they went to ask for the carriage-hire of three rupees and two annas they were at first curtly refused ! Reluctantly three rupees were given, but not the two annas ! They said, “That will do !””

DEVENDRA AND KALIPADA

Devendranath Mazumdar, brother of the famous Bengali poet Surendranath Mazumdar, was a middle-aged man of quiet disposition who worked in a zemindar's office and lived with a relative in Calcutta. He had doubts of the existence of God, which were not removed by discussion. He had a strong desire to realize God, but did not know the necessary steps to take to attain that end ; so he decided to seek the aid of a Guru. "But he must be a real Guru," he thought and fervently prayed to God to send him one.

As his longing for God intensified he could not sleep. The thought, "If God exists, why does He not reveal Himself to me ?" bothered him night and day. One morning he decided to go to Bhagavan Das, the celebrated Vaishnava saint of Kalna and take initiation from him. But he missed the steamer. A friend whom he went to see was not at home. He opened a book at random. In a footnote on the page before him was written: "This is also the opinion of Ramakrishna Paramahansa of Rasmani's Kali temple at Dakshineswar." "Ramakrishna Paramahansa !" he said to himself, "why, a Paramahansa is a saint who has realized God. Perhaps he can help me to reach my goal ?" He decided to visit Sri Ramakrishna, set out at once for Dakshineswar and reached the temple garden about noon. From the boat he could see a man with an arm in a sling standing in the garden. Devendra landed and asked where the Paramahansa lived. A room was pointed out to him. There was no one in the room when he went there, and he was waiting in the verandah, when a plainly dressed man in slippers, the skirt of his cloth thrown across his shoulder, came in. He recognized him as the man whom he had seen from the boat, and concluded that he must be the Paramahansa. He bowed before him, and the Master asked him to enter by the northern door. Seeing that he was taking off his shoes at some distance, Sri Ramakrishna advised him to come nearer before removing them, so that they might not be stolen. Then he asked him whence he came. "From Calcutta," replied Devendranath. "To see the Deity in this form, may be ?"—posing as Sri Krishna

with His flute. "No, sir," said Devendra, "I have come to see you." "To see me!" repeated the Master. "Ah, what is there to see in me? Look, I have broken my arm. Oh, what pain!" He made Devendra feel his injured arm and said, "Will you see if the bone has been fractured? It is so painful!" Devendra examined again and asked how he had met with that accident. Sri Ramakrishna said, "Sometimes I fall into a peculiar state, and the arm was broken on one of those occasions. The pain increases when any medicine is used. So I have stopped using any medicine. Do you think I shall recover?" Devendra said, "Yes, certainly." In a moment all trace of pain seemed to disappear. He called out like a boy to the bystanders, "Look here, this gentleman from Calcutta says that my arm will get well!"

Devendra saw that Sri Ramakrishna's body was as delicate as a woman's and his mind as frank as a child's. He said to himself, "What a strange man he is! He takes me for an oracle. Is it possible for a man to be so artless? Or is it all a hoax?" But the Master's childlike behaviour dispelled all his doubts. In the course of conversation Sri Ramakrishna explained the significance of divine love. Then he asked a young devotee to give Devendra something to eat.

After some time Sri Ramakrishna said to Devendra, "Many respectable Brahmins eat here. It is a temple, and there can be no objection to your taking Prasad with us. The day is already advanced. Do not leave now." Calling Ramlal he said, "Give Devendra the Prasad from the Vishnu temple." Devendra was astonished—how did Sri Ramakrishna know that he was a vegetarian? Could he read men's hearts? He ate his meal and eagerly asked from Ramlal details about the Master's life. His mind was in a state of wonderment.

In the afternoon the Master asked, "Why do you look so pale? Are you ill?"—Devendra was having a relapse of his old malaria fever. Sri Ramakrishna became extremely anxious and when Baburam came, asked him to take Devendra to Calcutta. As they were leaving, Sri Ramakrishna requested Devendra to come and see him without fail after he recovered.

Devendra lay unconscious for six weeks. In delirium he was often heard to mutter the name of Sri Ramakrishna. He

¹The Vaishnavites are vegetarians; the Shaktas may or may not be vegetarians.

fancied that he was at Dakshineswar, and curiously enough, whenever excessive pain caused him to open his eyes, he would see the Master seated by his bed. On recovery he dismissed these visions as mere hallucinations and gave up all thought of visiting Sri Ramakrishna again, thinking his relapse to be the result of his trip to Dakshineswar.

A few months passed in this way. The desire to realize God was not so keen now, but it had not disappeared altogether. Whenever the idea of visiting Dakshineswar cropped up in his mind, it would be checked by a thought of the fever. As an alternative, he began to practise the Gayatri. But this produced unexpected results. It revived his yearning for God and for a competent Guru. But he could not make up his mind to go to see Sri Ramakrishna. One day, while returning from his office he stopped at a friend's house, but he was out ; while he waited for his return he chanced to see the following item of news in a Bengali newspaper: "Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa will meet his devotees this evening at the house of Srijut Balaram Bose of Baghbazar." This was sufficient. All the arguments against visiting the Master disappeared in a moment. Unable to resist any longer, he started at once for Baghbazar and sought the place at dusk. There was a great gathering. Sri Ramakrishna was dancing in ecstasy ; some were singing, and others were dancing around him. The whole place thrilled with joy. Devendra watched the scene, but did not dare to face the Master after his long absence. Sri Ramakrishna joined now and then in the song as he danced. When the Kirtana was finished and Sri Ramakrishna had almost regained his normal mood, there was a rush to touch his feet. Devendra saw that this was an opportunity to salute him without attracting attention. He elbowed his way through the crowd and touched his feet. Just then he felt a gentle tap on the back and heard a familiar voice asking, "Hullo, you are here ! Why haven't you been coming to Dakshineswar ? I often think of you. You are all right now, I hope ?" "Sir," said Devendra apologetically, "I was bed-ridden for a long time." Then the Master—for it was he—eagerly said, "You must come again. Do you hear ?" Devendra's heart melted at this kindness. "Yes, sir," he said, "I will."

He kept his promise and soon tasted the bliss of the divine company of the Master. He carried on his Sadhana according

to his directions and was blessed with various realizations. Afterwards he felt a strong desire to give up the world and begged the Master's blessing, but he was advised to live as a householder as it would not stand in the way of his spiritual progress ; and so he remained in the world.

One day, a lady belonging to a respectable Hindu family came to Dakshineswar ostensibly to visit Rani Rasmani's Kali temple, but really to see Sri Ramakrishna about whom she had heard. While her companions were visiting the temples, she quietly entered the master's room. With tears in her eyes she told him that her husband, really a good and sincere man, sought bad company and had contracted evil habits. She prayed to the Master to bless her and to suggest some way of influencing him towards good. Sri Ramakrishna consoled her and said that her husband was really a devotee of God, and that ere long he would come to Dakshineswar. With this assurance she returned home much comforted.

Her husband, Kalipada Ghosh, held an important position in Messrs John Dickinson & Co., and was an intimate friend of Girish Chandra Ghosh, from whom he heard one day about Sri Ramakrishna. Out of curiosity to see the man about whom he had heard so many strange things, he hired a boat and went to Dakshineswar. He found the Master's room crowded with devotees. Sri Ramakrishna welcomed him cordially as if he were an old acquaintance. When a few minutes later the Master expressed a desire to go to Calcutta, Kalipada put himself and the boat at the Master's disposal. The Master accepted the offer and, accompanied by Latu, went to Calcutta. On the way Sri Ramakrishna asked Kalipada what particular manifestation of the Divinity he preferred. "I adore the goddess Kali, my namesake," replied Kalipada. "Are you initiated?" inquired the Master. "No, sir," said Kalipada, "But I shall most gladly take initiation from you if you will kindly consent to be my Guru." Up to this time he had had no faith in human Gurus ; in fact he was determined to accept only God Himself as spiritual guide. Yet at the very first contact with Sri Ramakrishna, he surrendered to him like a child. With a smile Sri Ramakrishna asked him to put out his tongue. He wrote some mystic syllables on it with his finger, telling him that this was the initiation. Only a few fortunate ones were initiated in this way. The boat

arrived in Calcutta, but the Master had no particular destination and suggested going to Kalipada's which pleased the latter greatly. Kalipada afterwards became one of the most devoted of disciples. He was of the "heroic" type of Bhaktas.

SHASHI, SHARAT, HARI, GANGADHAR,
SARADA, TULSI, AND HARIPRASANNA

Shashibhushan and Sharatchandra Chakravarti, two cousins, of a pious Brahmin family of Calcutta, were members of a Brahmo organization started under the influence of Keshab Chandra Sen, and learned of Sri Ramakrishna from some fellow-members of the association who had seen the Master at the Brahmo Samaj. The members of this society resolved to celebrate their anniversary at Dakshineswar, where they would enjoy the company of Sri Ramakrishna. On a certain day in October, 1883, they arrived at the garden. Shashi and Sharat went to see the Master and found him seated on the small bedstead in his room. Sri Ramakrishna received them with a smile and had a mat spread on the floor where they were to sit. He asked them their names and where they lived, and was pleased to hear that they belonged to Keshab's Brahmo Samaj. Then he said, "Bricks and tiles, if burnt after the trademark has been stamped on them, retain those marks for ever. Similarly you should be stamped with spirituality before entering the world. Then you will not become attached. But nowadays parents marry their boys too young. By the time they finish their education, they are already the fathers of children and have to run hither and thither in search of a job to maintain the family. They find it difficult to secure an appointment with sufficient salary to feed so many mouths. So they have little time to think of God." "Then, sir, is it wrong to marry? Is it against the will of God?" asked one of the boys. Sri Ramakrishna asked him to take down one of the books from the shelf and read aloud an extract from the Bible setting forth Christ's opinion on marriage: "For there are some eunuchs, which were so born from their mother's womb: there are some eunuchs, which were made eunuchs of men; and there be eunuchs, which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He that is able to receive let him receive." And St. Paul's: "I say, therefore, to the unmarried and widows, it is good for them if they abide even as I. But if they cannot contain, let them marry: for it is better to marry than to burn." When the

passage was read, Sri Ramakrishna remarked that marriage was the root of all bondage. One among the audience interrupted him saying, "Do you mean to say, sir, that marriage is against the will of God? And how can His creation go on if people cease to marry?" Sri Ramakrishna smiled and said, "Don't worry about that. Those who like to marry are at perfect liberty to do so. What I said just now was between ourselves. I say what I have got to say; you may take as much or as little of it as you like." He asked Shashi whether he believed in God with form or without form. With characteristic frankness the boy answered, "I am not certain about the very existence of God, so I am not able to speak one way or the other!" The reply pleased the Master very much.

After some time, the boys returned home. Shashi and Sharat were fascinated by the personality of Sri Ramakrishna. They said to themselves, "Henceforth we shall visit this holy man. If one wishes to learn the secret of spirituality, one must go to him." From his boyhood Shashi cherished a great regard for religious books. The Bible and the lives of Sri Gauranga and other saints were among his favourite books. Prayer, meditation and worship were part of his daily occupation. His hankering for God was evidenced by his regular attendance at the Brahmo Samaj. He was a brilliant student and was preparing for the First Examination in Arts when he met the Master. Naturally his parents built great hopes on him. But Shashi bade adieu to all worldly prospects as soon as he had a glimpse of something higher through his contact with Sri Ramakrishna. He soon became one of the inner circle of the Master's followers and made him the polestar of his life.

Sharat was not behind his cousin in his appreciation of Sri Ramakrishna and became a great devotee. At the first sight the Master noticed his stern spirit of renunciation. One day the Master was seated in his room at Dakshineswar, surrounded by a group of devotees. Ganesha, the Hindu god of success, was the topic of conversation. The Master praised highly the integrity of character of this deity, his utter absence of passion and single-minded devotion to his mother, the goddess Durga. In this connection he narrated some anecdotes from the Hindu mythology which brought the divine character of Ganesha vividly before his audience. Young Sharat was present. Sud-

denly he said, "Well, sir, I like the character of Ganesha very much. He is my ideal." The Master at once corrected him saying, "No, Ganesha is not your ideal. Your ideal is Shiva. You possess Shiva-attributes." Then he added, "Think of yourself, always, as Shiva and of me as Shakti. I am the fountain of all your power (Shakti)." It is not for us ordinary mortals to understand the significance of this mystic utterance. But it is none the less a fact that Sharat in later years showed in a wonderful degree a spirit of calmness, fortitude, forbearance, sympathy for others, and readiness to share their burdens, which are the special characteristics of Shiva. He realized perfectly that Sri Ramakrishna was the repository of the powers which enabled him to attain success in his individual spiritual life as well as in the great Ramakrishna Order.

One day the Master asked Sharat, "How would you like to realize God? What divine visions do you prefer to see in meditation?" Sharat replied, "I do not want to see any particular form of God in meditation. I want to see Him as manifested in all creatures of the world. I do not like visions." The Master said with a smile, "That is the last word in spiritual attainment. You cannot have it all at once." "But I won't be satisfied with anything short of that," replied the boy, "I shall trudge on in the path of religious practice till that blessed state arrives."

Of Shashi and Sharat Ramakrishna used to say that both of them were followers of Jesus the Christ in a former incarnation.

Another great disciple who was attracted by the magnetic personality of Sri Ramakrishna was Harinath Chatterjee of Baghbazar. Orphaned when quite young, he was reared by his brother. He became the leader among his chums, and his love of justice made him an influence for good. His relatives were amazed at his spiritual fervour even in boyhood. Like a real orthodox Brahmin he bathed thrice a day and cooked his own meals, which he offered to God before eating. He arose every morning before sunrise and recited the whole Gita from memory. He had a passion for the Vedanta philosophy; Shankara moulded his life, and the Advaita Vedanta left an indelible impress upon his mind. He tried to live according to Vedanta and succeeded in some measure. One day, while bathing in the Ganga, he perceived something moving on the surface of the

water at a few yards' distance from him. People of the bank shouted that it was a crocodile. He hurried towards the shore, but the next moment he thought, "What a coward I am ! Do I not read every day that I am the immortal Soul ? And now I am skulking before a crocodile !" He retraced his steps and finished his bath, not however without some little trepidation.

His elder brother, who was his guardian, did not thwart his religious pursuits, and silenced friends who complained of the queer conduct of the boy, by saying, "Why, he is doing just what we and everybody else ought to do." The following is his own version of his first encounter with Sri Ramakrishna: "I first met the Master in the house of Dinanath Bose of Baghbazar when I was a boy of thirteen or fourteen. The Master at that time remained mostly in Samadhi. The news that the Paramahansa would come was circulated, and on the appointed day I went to get a view of the man. Soon a hackney carriage with two passengers in it stopped in front of the house. A stout, strong man, with forehead painted with vermilion and a gold amulet on his right arm, alighted from it. It was Hriday. He helped the other person—who was no other than Sri Ramakrishna—to alight, holding him by the hand. The Master was thin and emaciated. He wore a shirt, and one end of his cloth was tied round the waist. He appeared to be totally unconscious of the world. When I got a better view of him, I saw that his face was surrounded with a halo. The thought immediately flashed in my mind, 'I have read about Shukadeva in the books. Is this then a man like him ?' Supported by his nephew, he walked to the room with tottering gait. Regaining a little consciousness of the world, he saw a large portrait of Kali on the wall and bowed his head before it. Then he sang a song depicting the oneness of Krishna and Kali which thrilled the audience."

Two or three years afterwards Harinath met the Master again at Dakshineswar. It was a holiday, and a crowd of devotees had assembled. Sri Ramakrishna took him aside and bade him come on any day but a holiday, when he would be free to talk. Harinath became passionately attached to the Master. He had never heard such words of wisdom before. It seemed to him that in spite of his illiteracy, the man of Dakshineswar had assimilated the real import of the Shastras. One day, after they

had been intimately acquainted, the young devotee said to the Master, "Sir, how pleasant and joyous is everything belonging to this place ! Calcutta seems like hell in comparison." "Why," said Sri Ramakrishna to cheer him, "you are a servant of the Lord Hari, and His servant can never be unhappy anywhere." "But I don't know that I am His servant," said the boy. The Master reiterated, "Truth does not depend upon anybody's knowledge of it. Whether you know it or not, you are a servant of the Lord." This reassured Harinath.

From an early age Harinath had an abhorrence for women. He did not allow even little girls to come near him. One day in answer to an inquiry from the Master on this subject, he said, "Oh, I cannot bear them." "You talk like a fool !" said the Master reprovingly : "Look down upon woman ! What for ? They are the manifestations of the Divine Mother. Bow down to them as to your mother and hold them in respect. That is the only way to escape their influence. The more you hate them, the more you will fall into the snare." These fiery words penetrated the heart of Harinath and changed his entire outlook on women. "Sir," he asked the Master another day, "how is one to be aware of the dawn of knowledge ?" Sri Ramakrishna replied, "A man does not jump about when he gets illumination. Outwardly he remains as he was ; but his entire perspective of the world is changed. The touch of the philosopher's stone converts a steel sword into gold. It retains its former shape intact, but it can no longer kill—it has become soft."

Like a true Vedantin, Harinath lived a life of asceticism and continence. The deeper he dived into Vedanta, the more its lofty ideal appealed to him. Plunged in the study of books on this subject, he did not come to Dakshineswar for some days. Sri Ramakrishna noticed his absence and said to him one day, "Hullo, you do not come here now so frequently. They say you are studying and meditating on Vedanta nowadays. It is good. But what does the Vedanta philosophy teach ? Brahman alone is real and everything else is unreal—isn't that its substance or is there anything more ? Then why don't you give up the unreal and cling to the real ?" These words threw a new light on Vedanta and turned Hari's thoughts in a new direction. A few days later Sri Ramakrishna went to Calcutta and sent for Harinath ; when he came, he found the Master in a state

of semi-consciousness. "It is not easy to see the world of phenomena as unreal," the Master began addressing the assembled devotees: "This knowledge is impossible without the special grace of God. Mere personal effort is powerless to confer this realization. A man is after all a tiny creature, with very limited powers. What an infinitesimal part of truth can he grasp by himself!" Harinath felt as if these words were directed to him, for he had been straining every nerve to attain illumination. The Master then sang a song eulogizing the miraculous power of divine grace. Tears flowed down his cheeks, literally wetting the ground. Harinath was deeply moved. He, too, burst into tears. After that he learned to surrender himself at the feet of the Lord.

Sri Ramakrishna loved Harinath dearly and used to speak highly of his great spiritual potentialities. Once the young man did not come to Dakshineswar for a number of days. When at last he came the Master said to him in a voice choked with emotion, "Why don't you come here? I love to see you all, because I know that you are God's special favourites. Otherwise what can I expect from you? You have not the means to offer me a pice worth of presents, nor have you a torne mat to spread on the floor when I go to your house. And still I love you so much. Don't fail to come here,¹ for this is where you will achieve everything. If you are sure to find God elsewhere, go there by all means. What I want is that you realize God, transcend the misery of the world and enjoy divine beatitude. Anyhow try to attain it in this life. But the Mother tells me that you will realize God without any effort if you only come here. So I insist upon your coming." As he spoke thus he actually wept.

Gangadhar Ghatak was a friend of Harinath, and he also first saw Sri Ramakrishna on the same occasion. He was fourteen years of age and reading in the second class. Like Hari he used to practise religious exercises regularly from his boyhood. He bathed thrice daily, cooked his own meals and read the Gita and the religious books. One day he went-off with a Sadhu, telling none about it. He had the idea of making pilgrimages to holy places, but the thought of his parents made him return after a month. But he did not resume his studies. Harinath, meanwhile, had been visiting Sri Ramakrishna. One day, in

¹ By 'here' he means himself.

1884, Gangadhar accompanied him to Dakshineswar. Sri Ramakrishna spoke affably with him, as if he had been an old acquaintance, and among other things asked him about his journey with the Sadhu and also if he had seen him before.

Thenceforth Gangadhar began to frequent Dakshineswar. He was very orthodox in his habits, and fearing lest Sri Ramakrishna should ask him to take the rice Prasad in the temple, he always went in the evening, when he took only fruits and sweets. Sri Ramakrishna noticed this. Once Gangadhar happened to be there in the day-time and was arranging to cook his meal, when the Master said to him, "The food offered to Kali is cooked in Ganga water and is very pure ; it is better even than Havishya.¹ You take that." Gangadhar could not refuse, and went to take the Prasad of the Kali temple. On his way he looked back and saw Sri Ramakrishna watching him, probably to see that he went to the right place. He took everything but fish and meat. Then he went to Sri Ramakrishna's room and found the Master standing with betel ready for him. As he was not used to chewing it, he refused it. Sri Ramakrishna said, "Why don't you take it ? What harm is there in it ? Narendra chews it a hundred times a day, and eats fish and flesh, just as they come. Yet his mind is always on the heights—he sees the Brahman in everything ! You are a boy. You needn't bother about giving up fish or betel, and living on Havishya cooked with your own hands. Just associate with Narendra."

Accordingly, one day Gangadhar went to Narendra's house to see him. He was so impressed with Narendra's appearance, conversation, and frank behaviour, that he became very much attached to him. Narendra loved him much and used to call him "Ganges". But Gangadhar kept his orthodoxy intact. And he could not understand why in the face of the verdict of the scriptures, Sri Ramakrishna should try to make him disregard it. Did he not believe in being orthodox ? A few days after this, Gangadhar went to Dakshineswar and found the Master talking to a group of people. One of them complained to him, "Sir, young boys come to you, and you teach them renunciation—you encourage them to give up the world and become Sadhus. Is that fair ?" The Master replied, "The boys who come here are

¹Rice and vegetables boiled together, without seasoning, considered a very pure food.

very pure and are inclined towards God from an early age. Some of them bathe thrice daily, eat Havishya cooked with their own hands, are devoted to the study of the scriptures, and so on. Little boys—who should be hankering after life—hunger for renunciation instead ! Can this be achieved in a single birth ? How many austerities and spiritual practices they must have gone through in previous lives to possess this devotional turn of mind from boyhood ! If I don't talk of religion to them, to whom else shall I talk ?" Gangadhar was cheered at these words, and his doubt was dispelled.

He visited Sri Ramakrishna now and then and served him occasionally during his last days at Cossipore. Even there he maintained his orthodox habits and cooked his own food. His association with the Master strengthened his spirit of renunciation, which afterwards took a tangible shape.

Sarada Prasanna Mitra came of a rich zemindar family of Barasat, 24-Parganas. From his very childhood he was a great devotee and fond of worship. He came to sit at the feet of the Master when he was in his teens. To the illuminated vision of Sri Ramakrishna the contents of his mind were revealed in every detail. All weaknesses were at once apparent and soon he applied the specific remedy for them.

In the home of Sarada there had always been servants who did all the menial tasks and other work of the household. Unconsciously or otherwise as a result of this early training, Sarada had held himself above menial tasks and brought this defect with him to Sri Ramakrishna. One unusually hot day, while visiting the temple at Dakshineswar, Sri Ramakrishna said, "Please bring some water and wash my feet." Sarada stood stockstill, rooted to the ground, a deepening flush rising to his forehead. Had he heard aright, were there not servants for such things ? Seemingly not noticing his confusion, the Master repeated the request ; and notwithstanding the presence of friends and others, there was nothing to do but to comply. With this single act, through the Master's grace, the pride of birth was for ever broken, and the true spirit of selfless service, which was really one of his innate qualities, was from that time on placed at the disposal of his Master and all humanity.

Of his many wonderful experiences while living with the Master, one stands out in marked relief. One of the last vestiges

of the ego to be removed is sex, with all its subtle ramifications, and years of practice and asceticism are often necessary for its eradication. Sarada had set his will to conquer this great foe, but the task seemed endless until, on a certain day, as he sat in meditation, he felt a definite motion of the Master's grace within and the idea of sex began to disappear like a mirage, never to return.

Tulasi Charan Datta was a boy of eighteen who lived in the Bosepara quarter of Calcutta. Late one afternoon he was chatting near his house with some friends, when he suddenly heard that a Paramahansa was visiting the house of Balaram Babu. Many people were going to see him ! Tulasi decided to go also to see what kind of a Paramahansa he was. When he reached Balaram's house, he found that the parlour and verandah were packed with visitors. Peeping in he saw in the centre of the room a vacant seat with a pillow. He went to the western verandah and waited. A few minutes after, he saw a man completely absorbed in himself, come staggering like one drunk, from the house. He came to where the boy stood, looked at him for a moment, and slowly tottered into the parlour. Tulasi stood nonplussed, forgetting even to salute the Master—for it was he. He felt a sort of creeping sensation within his bosom, and his whole body seemed to be paralysed. When this feeling subsided, he ran home.

A few days after the above incident, Tulasi went to see his friend Harinath. The latter proposed to go to Dakshineswar and see the Paramahansa. When they reached there, they found that the Master had gone to Calcutta. So they missed him. They went into his room, and Tulasi began to look at the pictures hanging from the wall. Among these was a photograph of the Master. When Tulasi saw it he was startled. He said at once, "I have seen him already." "Where ?" asked Harinath. "At the house of Balaram Babu," replied Tulasi. "Then it is all right," said Hari.

Shortly after this Tulasi went to Dakshineswar alone. He sought Sri Ramakrishna and found him at his noon meal. He saluted and sat on the floor. This was the first time he had ever bowed down to the Master. It did not occur to him that he must not salute a man engaged in eating, or that his presence might be an intrusion. But Ramakrishna did not mind these

breaches of etiquette. After finishing his meal he began to talk to the boy. They were alone. Only the Holy Mother was in the screened verandah to the north. After a few preliminary personal questions, Sri Ramakrishna surprised the boy by suddenly saying, "The other day a boy resembling you came here and asked me if I could act as his intermediary." Tulasi did not understand ; so he remained silent. Sri Ramakrishna continued, "By the word intermediary I mean one who brings about the meeting of an individual with his Beloved Lord. He is the Guru, and he is all. There is no difference between him and God." Tulasi understood that the Master wished to be regarded in that light by him. After a while Sri Ramakrishna placed his left hand on the boy's shoulder as a mark of favour and slowly walked towards the Panchavati. Tulasi's heart was filled with joy when he was asked to come frequently. After reaching the Panchavati, Sri Ramakrishna saluted the spot where he had practised his Sadhanas and sat on a lower step. Then in an exalted mood he began to talk to the Mother. Tulasi could catch only the word "Mother" now and then. After a while the Master returned to his room, and Tulasi took leave of him for the day. After the passing of the Master, he renounced the world.

Hariprasanna Chatterjee of Belgharia was introduced to Sri Ramakrishna in 1883 while he was in college by his friends Shashi and Sharat. The Master took an active interest in the boy, who visited him a number of times. Then he ceased coming. Noticing his absence the Master sent an invitation to him through Sharat to come. Sharat delivered the message, but Hariprasanna was unable to accept it. Later the Master said to Sharat, "Well, Mother says he will not come now." Sharat did not believe him, and continued in his efforts to bring Hariprasanna to Dakshineswar. But something or other happened to prevent it.

Among other things the Master gave Hariprasanna the following drastic advice: "Even if a woman is like pure gold and rolls on the ground through love of God, it is dangerous to look at her." He asked him if he would be willing to beg his food from door to door. The boy said he would. The Master evidently had a glimpse of this young aspirant's future life, and tried to instil into his mind a love for renunciation. Hariprasanna became a monk some years later.

KALI AND SUBODH

Kali Prasad Chandra first came to see Sri Ramakrishna about the end of the year 1883. His father was a teacher in a Calcutta school. Kali was of a religious nature even in early boyhood and used to read the Bhagavad Gita and other sacred books. At the proper age he was sent to school, where Baburam was his classmate. At school he excelled in drawing. One day his teacher praised his skill and prophesied a bright future for him. "But, sir," said the boy, "I don't wish to excel in this art." "Why not?" asked the teacher. He said in reply, "The painter paints only the surface of things, but the philosopher goes beyond the surface to the cause of things. I will be a philosopher and not a painter."

To quench his thirst for the knowledge of the Hindu Shastras, Kali studied day and night. Nothing attracted him so much as the study of Yoga. One day, he read that no one could be Yogi without a Guru. This made him eager to find a true spiritual teacher. A classmate with whom he discussed the matter, told him of Sri Ramakrishna whom he called a Paramahansa or perfected sage. Some time after, Kali resolved to go to see Sri Ramakrishna. He started for Dakshineswar, but not knowing the way, went astray, and it was noon when tired and hungry he reached his destination. His disappointment knew no bounds when he found that Sri Ramakrishna had gone to Calcutta. He sat down, not knowing what to do. He had no money for food or to return to Calcutta. Fortunately a boy of his age accosted him and asked him what he wanted. It was Shashi. Kali told his story and expressed his desire to return to Calcutta. Shashi induced him to stay and made him comfortable.

The two boys spent the afternoon and evening together. At night Shashi informed Kali that the Master had returned. Kali waited eagerly. In a few minutes he heard footsteps at the door and the name of the goddess Kali uttered feelingly thrice. He was profoundly impressed. Sri Ramakrishna entered the room. When the Master heard that Kali was there, he asked to see him. Kali entered the room trembling with awe. To his great surprise he saw, instead of an ascetic with matted locks

and emaciated form, a plain man of middle age, with a smiling countenance. Sri Ramakrishna asked him a few questions and told him that he would see him the next morning. Kali spent the night in the verandah and called on the Master in the morning. The Master talked with him for a while and asked him in passing if he had married. Kali replied in the negative, but said that his parents were urging him to do so. The Master next took him to the northern verandah and made him sit on a wooden bedstead. He then touched the boy, who immediately felt that some power had been transmitted to him. Then he was told to go to Kali temple and meditate for a while, Sri Ramakrishna directing him what to do. When Kali took his leave, the Master affectionately asked him to come again.

Sri Ramakrishna said many things about Kali. One day he remarked that his eyebrows reminded him of Sri Krishna's. On another occasion he said that the boy had something of the personality of Krishna. When Kali told him of his great interest in Yoga philosophy, he said, "You were a Yogi in your past life. That is why you were inclined to Yoga so young." From the very beginning Kali attracted the notice of the Master by his neatness and orderliness. The Master always praised his methodical habits.

Kali began to practise religious discipline under the guidance of Sri Ramakrishna, and through his grace was blessed with many wonderful visions. One day in a vision he saw Sri Ramakrishna in company with other past Incarnations of the Lord. These divine personages entered one by one into Sri Ramakrishna's body and came out again. This convinced Kali that Sri Ramakrishna was the embodiment of all previous Incarnations. Kali possessed a mind which responded easily to any religious stimulus. He always saw visions of gods and goddesses during meditation. One day he saw them all merging in the body of one luminous being. He narrated this experience to Sri Ramakrishna, who said, "Ah, you have seen the Vaikuntha! Henceforth you will no longer have these visions. You have risen above that state." This proved to be true. Thereafter Kali in his meditations would be occupied with the ideas of infinity and vastness, etc., associated with the Impersonal Brahman, instead of the familiar forms of deities.

Kali belonged to the inner circle of Sri Ramakrishna's

young devotees. He visited the Master every now and then and sometimes passed a day or two with him. He was an expert angler and often fished in the temple-garden ponds. One day he caught three or four fishes. The Master learning of it asked him why he was so cruel. Kali replied promptly, "Why, sir, I have done nothing wrong. We are all Atman, and the Atman is immortal. Therefore I have not really killed the fish." "My dear boy," said the Master, "You are mistaken. A man of realization can never be cruel to others. It is against his very nature. Such a man cannot make a false step—his mind never thinks in a wrong way. Reflect upon this."¹ Kali left the place silently. He pondered over the words for three days and at last realized their truth.

Subodh was a High School boy of seventeen belonging to the family of Shankar Ghosh, the founder of the Kali temple at Thanthania, Calcutta. He, however, cared more for spiritual things than academical ones. One day his father gave him "The Sayings of Sri Ramakrishna." Subodh was so deeply impressed by it that a great desire arose in his mind to meet the Master. When he told his father of this desire, he was promised a trip to Dakshineswar later with the rest of the family. But Subodh would not wait. In a few days, with a friend, Kshirode, he started for Dakshineswar. This was some time in 1885.

Subodh had an idea that a Paramahansa was some sort of a magician. He had never before spoken to a Sadhu ; so he said to his friend, "You must go forward and talk with the holy man. I don't know the proper etiquette." The friend agreed. They entered the Master's room and saluted him with folded hands. "Where do you come from ?" asked Sri Ramakrishna. "From Calcutta," was the reply. Pointing to Subodh he said, "Why is he standing so far off ? Come nearer." Thus encouraged, Subodh went closer. "Do you not belong to the family of Shankar Ghosh ?" asked Sri Ramakrishna. Subodh was surprised and said, "Yes, sir, but how did you know of it ?" "When I was staying at Jhamapukur," said Sri Ramakrishna, "I often visited your home as well as your Kali temple at Thanthania. That was before your birth. I knew you would come. Well, Mother sends here those who will attain spirituality. Why do

¹ Compare this with the lesson Sri Ramakrishna gave Balaram about killing. It gives us an idea as to how individual was his teaching.

you stand so far off? Come closer." Subodh approached the Master, who grasped his hand and closed his eyes for a few minutes. At last he said, "You will attain the goal. Mother says so."

The Master asked for a mat for Subodh and his friend and then asked them how they had come to Dakshineswar. Subodh, who because of the Master's kindness had lost his shyness, said, "Why, on foot." "Indeed!" exclaimed the Master, "but how did you know about me?" "I liked your sayings so much," said Subodh, "you are such a great man, and so famous! Therefore we have come to see you." These words brought a sudden change in the Master's expression. With a humility that amazed the boys he said, "Ah, I am worse than a worm. Name and fame! Ridiculous! Really I am more insignificant than a worm." After a little pause, he said to Subodh, "Mother sends here those who will receive Her grace. Come here on Tuesdays or Saturdays. Many people from your part of town come here those days. Come with them." Subodh said, "No sir, that will not do, for my relatives will find out that I am coming here. Please tell me what you have got to say now." "I cannot recall my words, my child," said the Master: "If I say I shall go to a certain place on such and such a day, I must do so at any cost. Even if I don't like it, Mother drags me there. I have said those words; so do come on Tuesdays or Saturdays." Subodh agreed, and finding it was getting late, asked leave to go home. Sri Ramakrishna treated the boys to some sweets and affectionately pressed them to accept carriage or boat-hire. But they declined and returned to Calcutta on foot.

On the following Saturday, Subodh stole away from school, and with his friend hurried to Dakshineswar. The Master's room was crowded with visitors. Peeping through the door the boys saluted Sri Ramakrishna, who when he caught sight of them raised his hand as a signal for them to stay outside. The Master asked the audience to wait and went out to greet them.

It was about 3 p.m. Sri Ramakrishna asked Rakhal to bring some Ganga water, with which he washed his hands. He then squatted on the staircase leading to the Shiva temples to the south of his room and bade the boys sit down also. He asked Kshirode to show his tongue. On it he wrote something with his finger and stroked his body from the navel to the throat. He

did the same to Subodh, saying, "Awake, Mother, awake !" Then he told both to meditate.

The magic touch awakened Subodh's latent spirituality. No sooner had he commenced to meditate than his whole body trembled, and felt a current rushing along the spinal column to his brain. An ineffable joy overwhelmed him, and he saw a strange light within him, in which the forms of numerous gods and goddesses flashed. The meditation deepened, and the boy lost all sense of personal identity. When he regained consciousness he found the Master stroking his body in the reverse order, from the head downwards. "Well," said he, "do you practise meditation at home ?" "Very little sir," replied the boy, "I used to think a little of gods and goddesses as I heard of them from my mother." "Ah," said the Master, "that's why you could concentrate so easily." Then he asked Kshirode if he had seen or felt anything. The boy replying in the negative, he said, "All right, you will do so later on."

Sri Ramakrishna then told them to go to the Panchavati and meditate, while he returned to his room. When they went to take leave of him they were given some sweets, and also pressed to take carriage-hire, which was declined. Sri Ramakrishna said to Subodh, "There is a teacher who lives near you, named Mahendra. He often comes here and is a good man. Go to see him now and then and come here also." Subodh made no reply, as he was not certain if he would be able to do so.

After meeting Sri Ramakrishna Subodh often saw a light between his eyebrows. When he told his mother she said, "You are fortunate, but don't divulge it to others. You will be a loser if you do so." "What harm can it do to me, mother ?" said the boy. "I do not want this light but That from which it comes."

Subodh lost all relish for study. He liked to be with Sri Ramakrishna always and to spend the time in meditation, prayer, or repeating the name of God. At a hint from the Master, Mahendra often invited Subodh to see him. But the boy did not go, thinking it idle to expect spiritual instruction from a householder. The next time he went to Dakshineswar, the Master introduced him to Shashi and Sharat and also told him to go to see Naren. Asked why he did not call on Mahendra, Subodh said, "Sir, he lives with his wife and children. What have I to do with him ?" Sri Ramakrishna laughed at these

words so indicative of renunciation and said, "He will talk only of me. Don't hesitate to go to him." Subodh agreed. A few days later he went to Mahendra and was cordially received. When asked his reason for not coming before, Subodh said frankly, "I did not like to come because you are a householder. But the Master has told me that you will speak to me of him only. Therefore I have come." "It's quite true," said Mahendra, "I am an insignificant person. But I live by the side of an ocean, and I keep with me a few pitcher of sea water. When a visitor comes, I entertain him with that. What else can I speak of but his words?" After some pleasant hours the boy took his leave. Thus did Sri Ramakrishna seal the bond of friendship and love among his disciples.

MEETING WITH PUNDIT SHASHADHAR TARKACHUDAMANI

On June 25th, the Master came with Hazra to the house of his devotee Ishan in Calcutta and spent the morning there, with Narendra and Rakhal. In the afternoon he went to visit Pundit Shashadhar Tarkachudamani, at the house of one of the Pundit's admirers in College Street. The Pundit was a Hindu preacher of great eloquence and erudition whose "scientific" interpretation of the Hindu religion was widely known. On his way there the Master plunged into Bhava-Samadhi. He was cordially received, and the Pundit saluted him with great humility and reverence. The Master took his seat, as did the devotees. Then he said to the Pundit, "Well, what do you lecture about?"

Shashadhar: "Sir, I try to expound the scriptures."

Sri Ramakrishna: "In this Kali Yuga, devotion as taught by Narada is the best. There is hardly time to go through all the rituals enjoined in the Shastras. Nowadays for fever you must prescribe a fever mixture, not the old indigenous remedies. While you are waiting for the old methods to work, the patient expires. So if you teach people rituals, you must tell them to adopt only as much of them as suits their requirements.

"Your lectures are having very little influence on worldly-minded people. You will soon find this out. The new-born calf cannot stand on its legs. You are unable to distinguish between a devotee and a man of the world. But that is not your fault. In a storm it is difficult to distinguish one kind of tree from another. Prior to realization none can give up rituals altogether. The flower drops off as soon as there is fruit. Devotion is the fruit, and rituals are the flower. The Sandhya merges in the Gayatri, the Gayatri in Om, and Om in Samadhi—like the chime of a bell gradually fading away."

In alluding to Samadhi, the Master fell into that state. As consciousness returned, he said addressing the Mother, "Mother, the other day Thou didst show me Vidyasagar. I wanted to see another scholar, and Thou hast brought me here." Turning to Shashadhar he said, "My boy, do try to become stronger. Practise

a little more. You have taken the role of a teacher too soon. But your intention is good. You want to help others. When I first heard of you," he continued bowing to the Pundit, "I inquired if you were a mere man of learning or one of discrimination and renunciation. A scholar without discrimination is a nonentity. There is no harm in playing the teacher's role if one has the authority from God. Such a one is invincible. One ray of light from the goddess of learning is sufficient to dim the brightest intellects. Moths come of themselves to a lighted lamp. They come in thousands—no one has to call them. Similarly, the man who has received the divine command need not issue invitations to his lectures. The magnet does not invite a piece of iron to come. It attracts automatically. Therefore I ask you if you have the command."

Hazra: "He must have had it. Isn't it so, Punditji?"

The Pundit: "No, sir, I cannot boast of any such command."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Of what value are the lectures of one who has not received the Lord's authority?"

He exhorted the Pundit to dive deep into devotion. He said, "Infinite are the ways leading to the ocean of immortality. You have to plunge in somehow. Suppose there is a pool of nectar, and you will become immortal if you sip a few drops. Of your own accord you may jump into the pool, or descend the steps and leisurely sip the nectar, or someone may push you in—the result is the same. You will be immortal if you but taste the nectar. There are infinite paths. You may follow any of these—knowledge, devotion, or work. If you are sincere, you will realize Him.

"If you realize the Mother of the universe, you will get knowledge as well as devotion."

The Pundit asked how far he had travelled on pilgrimage.

Sri Ramakrishna: "I have visited some holy places. (Smiling) Hazra went very far, and climbed high up. He went to Rishikesh. I neither went so far nor climbed so high. Kites and vultures also soar very high, but they are always searching for carrion down below. Lust and wealth are this carrion. If you can attain to devotion sitting here, what's the use of going to holy places?"

"And know one thing. However much you may instruct a man, there will be no effect until the right moment comes.

The child, when it went to bed, said to its mother, 'Wake me up, mother, when I am hungry.' The mother replied, 'Don't be afraid, my child, your hunger will wake you up.' Similarly, intense yearning for God comes only at the right moment.

"There are three classes of doctors. There are those who feel the pulse of the patient, prescribe medicine, and go away after telling him to take it. They form the lowest class. Similarly, there are some teachers who instruct a disciple, but do not care to see if those instructions are carried out. There is another class of doctors who prescribe medicine for the patient and ask him to take it. If he is unwilling, they reason with him. This is the second class. Likewise there are second class teachers, who instruct the disciple and exhort him to act up to their advice. Lastly, there is the highest class of doctors who, finding that the patient does not heed gentle persuasion, use force to make him swallow the medicine. Similarly, there are the highest class of teachers, who even use force to put their disciples on the path of righteousness."

The Pundit: "Sir, if there are first class teachers, why then did you say that there would be no effect till the right moment?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "But suppose the medicine does not get into the stomach but trickles out of the mouth; what will the doctor do in such a case? Even a first class doctor is powerless there.

"You must suit the instruction to the requirements of the disciple. This you do not do. If a boy comes to me, I first ask him about his relatives. Suppose he has no father, or is burdened with his father's debt; how can he devote his mind to God? Are you listening?"

The Pundit: "Yes, sir, I am all attention."

Sri Ramakrishna: "One day there came to the Dakshineswar temple a number of Sikh soldiers. I met them before the Kali temple. One of them said, 'God is merciful.' I said, 'Indeed! How do you know that?' They said, 'Why sir, 'He feeds us and takes such care of us.' I said, 'Is it a thing to wonder at? Isn't He the father of us all? If a father does not look after his children, who else will? Will strangers do it?'"

Narendra: "Shouldn't we then call Him merciful?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Certainly you may. What I mean is that God is our most intimate relation, not a stranger."

The Pundit: "What priceless words !"

The Master was thirsty. A glass of water was brought, which, however, he would not take. He asked for another one. It was learnt later that an impure man had touched the first glass.

Sri Ramakrishna, wishing to take leave, said by way of a compliment to Shashadhar, "It is a great day for me—today I have seen the new crescent. I have used the phrase purposely. Sita said to Ravana, 'You are the full moon, and my Ramachandra is the new crescent.' Ravana could not read between the lines, so he was very glad. Sita only meant that Ravana had reached the zenith of his power ; like the full moon he would wane. Whereas Ramachandra was the new crescent—he would flourish day by day."

On June 30th the Pundit with his elder brother visited Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar. The Master was often nervous as a child when a celebrated person came to see him. On occasions like these he was conscious of his illiteracy as well as fearful of the trances in which he lost control of his body. He asked some of the devotees to be present during the interview, so that they might engage the Pundit in conversation as well as take care of him (the Master). But as was his wont, he forgot all these when Shashadhar came. He gazed at the Pundit for a while and fell into a semi-conscious state.

"You are a scholar," he said, "tell me something." Shashadhar replied humbly, "My heart is dried up with too much philosophy. I have come to you for a little devotion. Please let me hear from you." Sri Ramakrishna said, "Ah, what shall I say? None can describe the true nature of Brahman. It first manifested Itself as a twin principle—half man and half woman—just to show that It was both Purusha and Prakriti. Descending a step lower, It separated into Purusha and Prakriti as distinct entities." He became animated as he spoke, sang song after song about the Divine Mother, and took the Pundit by storm. Gradually his emotions abated, and he exhorted Shashadhar to practise devotion with intense longing and prayer. He said, "Hearing is better than reading. One understands the truth better by hearing it from the lips of the Guru or a real monk. One does not have to pay attention to the unimportant details in the scriptures. Seeing, again, is better than hearing. I mean

actual realization. It dispels all doubt. The Shastras teach a good many things. But unless one realizes God, unless one has devotion to His lotus feet, unless one's mind is purified, everything is useless. The Bengali almanac makes a forecast of the annual rainfall, but if you squeeze the book, not a drop of water do you get."

The next day the Master thus told of his interview with the Pundit to a devotee: "Not entirely rid of my nervousness, I kept looking at him and listening to his words. Suddenly the Mother revealed Shashadhar's inner self to me. I saw that scriptural erudition was of no avail without discrimination and renunciation. Then I felt a current rush towards my head, and the last trace of fear vanished from my mind. I was swept from my moorings and was dead to the outside world. Out of this mouth came an incessant torrent of words. The more I talked the more I felt that a fresh supply was coming from behind as at Kamarpukur when a man measures grains, a fresh supply is pushed forward. I was entirely unconscious of what I said. When I regained a little consciousness, I found the Pundit in tears, completely overpowered. Occasionally I have this experience."

Three days later the Pundit visited him again at Balaram Bose's house. The Master said, "There are two tests of knowledge. One is a quiet nature, and the other an absence of egoism. You have both."

The Pundit: "What sort of devotion is necessary to attain the Lord?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Devotion is of three kinds according to temperament. It has a Sattvika, a Rajasika, and a Tamasika aspect.

"The Sattvika aspect of devotion the Lord alone knows. Such a devotee loves secrecy. Perhaps he meditates within a mosquito-curtain, so that nobody may know of it. As the crimson glow of dawn heralds the rising sun, so a man with perfect Sattva is close to realization.

"He who has the Rajasika aspect of devotion loves display—wants to make his devotion known. He worships in a royal style, goes to his worship-room dressed in silk, and puts on a necklace of Rudraksha, set with pearl or gold beads.

"The Tamasika aspect of devotion is like a band of dacoits raiding a house. They may attack with a husking machine to act as a battering ram, and defy even a posse of eight Sub-

inspectors of Police. 'Kill and plunder' is their battle-cry. A devotee of this type madly shouts, 'Hara, Hara, Hara, Vyom, Vyom ! Victory to Kali !' He has a wonderful strength of mind and a blazing faith !

"The followers of Shakti have faith like that. They say, 'Once I have taken the name of Kali, or Durga, or Rama, what sin can I commit ?'

"The Vaishnavas have very negative ideas—they are ever crouching and belittling themselves. They are constantly engaged in telling beads (turning to Balaram's father, who was present) and go about petitioning God, 'O Krishna, have pity on me—I am a despicable creature, a sinner.'

"One must have the tremendous faith that the utterance of His name burns away all sins. How absurd to repeat the Lord's name day and night, and talk of sin in the same breath !"

Fired with enthusiasm Sri Ramakrishna sang: "Mother, if I die with Thy name on my lips, Thou canst not cast me away in my hour of peril !"

The Pundit was weeping. Sri Ramakrishna's words, coupled with his life of blazing renunciation, touched a tender chord in his heart. It was Car-Festival day. There were songs and dances, in which Sri Ramakrishna joined. At the end of the programme the Master said: "This kind of thing represents the joy of spiritual practice. The joy of worldly-minded people is derived from sense-objects, from the enjoyment of lust and wealth. When in the course of spiritual practice the Lord is pleased to manifest Himself, then comes the highest enjoyment—the bliss of Brahman."

The Pundit (humbly): "What sort of yearning is needed to bring about this happy state of the mind ?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "This yearning comes when the heart struggles sincerely for realization. The teacher said to the disciple, 'Come, I shall show you what intensity of yearning one must have to realize God.' He took the disciple to a pond and pushed him under the water. Raising him up after a while, he asked the disciple how he had felt. The disciple replied, 'Why, I was gasping for breath !' "

The Pundit: "It is quite clear now."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Love for God is the chief thing. We need devotion."

MEETING WITH BANKIM CHANDRA CHATTERJEE

Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, the great Bengali novelist, met Sri Ramakrishna once only, in the house of Adhar Chandra Sen, in December, 1884. Adhar had invited several of his brother officers, of whom Bankim was one, to meet the Master. Adhar introduced Bankim thus: "Sir, he is a great scholar and has written many books. He has come to see you. His name is Bankim Babu."

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling): "Ah, Bankim !¹ Well, whose influence has bent you ?"

Bankim (smiling): "Ah, sir, the kick of British boots."

Sri Ramakrishna: "No, no, I don't mean that. Some say Sri Krishna was bent through love—love of Sri Radha. It made his body pliant and gave him his characteristic pose. Do you know why he looks so dark and small—like a man ? So long as God is at a distance, He looks dark, as the water of the ocean appears blue from a distance. But it is no longer so when you go near or take some of it in your hand. Then it is transparent. The sun appears very small because it is so far off ; close by it would be immense. God is neither dark nor small, if one knows His real nature. But it is a thing far, far off— one cannot realize it except in Samadhi. As long as there is the distinction of 'I' and 'thou', name and form must remain. It is all His play. As long as we are obsessed with the idea of separateness, God reveals Himself in forms.

"Sri Krishna is the Purusha—the Male Principle, and Radha is his Shakti—the Primordial Power. What is the significance of the united forms of Krishna and Radha ? It means that Purusha and Prakriti are identical—there is no difference between them. Purusha cannot exist without Prakriti nor can Prakriti exist without Purusha. One implies the other. Therefore you find in the united forms of Krishna and Radha that their eyes are riveted on each other. Radha's complexion is bright like lightning ; and Krishna's cloth is yellow. Sri Krishna's complexion is blue as a cloud ; Radha's robe is blue, and she

¹ "Bankim" literally means bent.

wears a sapphire. She has ringing anklets, and Krishna wears the same. That is to say, the union between Purusha and Prakriti is both internal and external."

When Sri Ramakrishna finished, Bankim began to talk in English with Adhar and his friends.

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling): "Well, what are you saying?"

Adhar: "Sir, we are discussing what you said just now."

Sri Ramakrishna: "I am put in mind of an amusing story. A barber was shaving a gentleman. His client said, 'Damn!' when the barber cut him. The barber didn't know the meaning of the word. He put his razor down, rolled up his sleeves—it was winter—and demanded in an angry tone what it meant. The gentleman said, 'Don't worry. Go on with your work. It doesn't mean anything. Only I want you to shave a bit more carefully.' But the barber wouldn't let him off so easily. He said, 'If the word means something good, I take it for myself, my father, and my whole ancestry; if it has a bad meaning, may it—with all its reduplications—go to you, your father, and your whole ancestry!'"

There was loud laughter over this. Then Bankim said to the Master, "Sir, why do you not preach?"

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling): "You talk of preaching! Preaching springs from egotism. Man is but a puny creature. Preaching is reserved for God who has created the sun and moon and brought this universe into being. Is it easy to preach? One cannot do so unless God reveals Himself and gives the commission. But you can have a travesty of this. You can preach without that commission; people will listen for a few days, but they will forget everything you have said. It will be an excitement like any other. They may say, 'Ah, how well he speaks!' But when you stop, you will find that no impression has been made.

"So long as there is fire under the pot of milk, the milk will hiss and swell. But as soon as you remove the fire, the milk sinks to its former level.

"First of all one must develop one's powers by spiritual practice. Otherwise it is like inviting a friend to share one's bed when it is hardly large enough for oneself."

Everyone listened with attention.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Bankim): "You are a great scholar and

have written many books. What do you think is the duty of man? What will he take with him after death? Of course you believe in a future life!"

Bankim: "Future life! What's that?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "After realization there is no more going to other planes, there is no more rebirth. But until one attains knowledge, realizes God, one must return again and again to this world. There is no escape. For such a one there is the next world. Of course when a man attains knowledge, realizes God, he is liberated and has no more to return. Boiled paddy, if sown, does not sprout. A man who is boiled, that is, perfected,¹ on the fire of knowledge no longer participates in the play of creation. It is impossible for him to be of this world, for he is not attached to lust and wealth. What is the good of sowing boiled paddy?"

Bankim (smiling): "Sir, there are also many worthless plants which do not yield any fruit."

Sri Ramakrishna: "But a Jnani should not be compared to these. One who has realized God has acquired not fruits like the gourd or pumpkin, but the fruit of immortality. He is never born again. He has to go nowhere, neither to this world, nor to the solar sphere nor to the lunar.

"All analogies are based on partial resemblance. You are a scholar, and you have studied logic. The expression, 'terrible as a tiger', does not mean that the object of comparison is an actual tiger. (Laughter)

"I said the same thing to Keshab. He asked me if there was a future life. I replied indirectly by saying, 'You have seen the potter drying his pots in the sun. Some are baked, others are unbaked. Sometimes cattle trample and break them. The baked ones are thrown away as useless. But the unbaked shards are collected, pounded with a little water and put on the wheel again to make new pots.' Then I added, 'So long as you are unbaked, the Potter will not let you go. Until you have attained knowledge—realized God—He will put you on the wheel again. That is to say, you have to be born again and again, and there is no escape. When you realize God, you are free, and the Potter throws you away, for you are no longer of any use in this

¹ Here there is a play on the word "Siddha" which has both these meanings.

creation of Maya. A Jnani has transcended Maya. What has he to do with it ?

"But He keeps some in this world of Maya, to teach mankind. A Jnani lives in the world, taking on the higher aspect of Maya in order to teach men. It is God who keeps him there to do His work. Shukadeva and Shankaracharya are cases in point.

(To Bankim): "What is your idea about the duties of man ?"

Bankim (smiling): "I should say, eating, sleeping, and enjoying the flesh."

Sri Ramakrishna (in disgust): "Pshaw, you are very saucy. You only talk of what you do always. Eructations often smell of what one eats—radish or green coconut for instance. You run constantly after lust and wealth, so only words about them come from your lips. Dwelling constantly on sense-objects makes one calculating—insincere. But meditation on God makes one straightforward.

"What will mere scholarship avail without meditation, discrimination, and renunciation ? A scholar who has studied much may be able to quote verses glibly or to write books, but if he is attached to lust and considers wealth and fame to be the essence of life, he is nothing. He is no scholar whose mind is not turned to God.

"Some think, 'These people are constantly busy with God, they are mad, they have lost their heads ! But how clever we are ! How we enjoy wealth, fame, and sense-pleasures !' Well, the crow also thinks it is very clever, but from early morning it is looking for filth. Look how restless it is, moving constantly!"

There was dead silence. Sri Ramakrishna continued: "Those who meditate on God, who pray day and night to be relieved of the craving for lust and wealth, to whom sense-pleasures taste bitter, and who can relish nothing but the bliss of the lotus feet of God—are of the nature of swans. If you place a mixture of milk and water before them, they will drink the milk only—the water they leave. You must also have noticed their gait. They walk straight ahead. So with real devotees—they march towards God alone. They want nothing else ; they have no relish for anything else. (To Bankim) Please don't take offence at my words."

Bankim: "Sir, I am not for soft words alone."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Lust and wealth constitute the world. They are Maya. They prevent us from seeing or thinking of God. After the birth of one or two children, one should live with one's wife as with a sister, and talk of God alone. Then both will be drawn to God, and the wife will become a help in the path of spirituality. Without giving up the animal instinct none can taste divine bliss. One should sincerely pray to God to be freed from it. Next is wealth. I used to sit on the bank of the Ganga below the Panchavati and assert that money was earth and earth money. Then I threw both into the Ganga."

Bankim: "Indeed ! Is money the same thing as earth ? Even with four pice one can help a poor person. If money is no better than earth, do you mean to say that charity and philanthropy are nothing ?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Charity ! Philanthropy ! Dare you say that you have the power to do good to others ? Well, man is so given to boasting, but if, when he is asleep, one pours ditch water into his mouth, does not know it. Where then would his boasting be ?

"A Sannyasin must give up lust and wealth for ever. What has once been spat out is spat out for good. When a Sannyasin gives to another, he knows that he himself is not doing it. To God alone belongs the right to practise charity, and no man can claim it. Charity and everything depends on His will. A true Sannyasin renounces both mentally and physically. He who does not eat molasses must not keep it about. If he does and advises others not to eat it, he will not be listened to.

"A householder, of course, requires money ; for he has wife and children. To maintain them, he must save. Two classes of beings never provide for the future—the monk and the bird. And yet the bird, when it has young ones to feed, must lay up stores.

"A genuine devotee, though he be in the world, performs his duties without attachment. He surrenders to God the fruits of his work—gain or loss, weal or woe, everything. Day and night he prays to God for devotion and only that. This is called work without motive. A Sannyasin also must work in the same spirit ; but he has not as many duties as the householder.

"If a householder gives in charity with a spirit of non-attachment, he does it for his *own* good and not for the good of others. He thereby serves God who resides in all beings, and service unto God means helping one's own self. If one serves God manifested through all beings—not only through men, but through birds and beasts also—without caring for name and fame, or for a heaven after death, expecting no return from those whom he serves, he really works without motive, and it benefits him alone. This is Karma-Yoga, one of the ways to realize God. But it is very difficult.

"Hence I say, one who does this kind of work unattached—who is kind and charitable—benefits only himself. It is God Who helps others. The love that you see in parents is His love: He has given it to them for the preservation of His creatures. The compassion which you notice in the generous is His compassion: He has put it there to save the helpless. Whether you are charitable or not, He has His work done some way or other. His work never stops.

"So the duty of man is to take refuge in Him and pray to Him eagerly for realization. One who has realized God craves nothing else. One who has tasted the syrup of candy cannot relish treacle.

"Those who want to build hospitals and dispensaries and are satisfied with that, are also good people, but they are of a different grade. The real devotee seeks nothing but God. If he has too much work to do, he prays earnestly to God, 'Lord, be gracious unto me and lessen my work. Otherwise my mind, which should exclusively think of Thee, becomes scattered—it thinks of sense-objects.' Genuine devotees form a class by themselves. Pure devotion is impossible without the conviction that God alone is real and all else unreal—that the world is transient, while its Creator alone is real and eternal.

"Some people think that God cannot be realized without the help of books and scriptures, that one should first of all learn of this world and its inhabitants, that one should study science. They hold that one cannot realize God without understanding His creation. What is your opinion? Which comes first, science or God?"

Bankim: "One should first of all know something about the world. How can one know of God without some such

knowledge? One should first learn from books."

Sri Ramakrishna: "That's the one cry of all of you! God is first, and then His creation. After realizing Him, you can know everything else, if it be necessary.

"First realize God, then think of creation or other things. Valmiki was given the name of Rama to repeat as Mantra, but he was told to repeat it in the inverse way—as Mara. The first syllable means God, and the last, the world. First God, and then the world. If you know one, you know all. If you put fifty zeroes after one, it makes a large sum. Omit the one, and the zeroes are nothing. It is the one that makes many. First one, then many. First comes God, then His creatures and the world.

"Your business is to realize God. Why do you worry so much about the world, creation, science, and all that? Suppose you desire to eat mangoes. What would you gain by gathering statistics about the mango-grove?"

Bankim: "Where can I get the mangoes?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Pray to God eagerly. If you are sincere, He will surely respond. Perhaps He will procure the advantage of holy company for you. Or somebody may give you directions as to how to realize God."

Bankim: "You mean the Guru? He keeps the best mangoes for himself and gives me only the bad ones!"
(Laughter)

Sri Ramakrishna: "Why do you think so? He knows what would suit a particular temperament. If the mother prepares a light diet for a child with a weak stomach, it does not mean that she loves him the less.

"One must have faith in the words of the Guru. The Guru is God, and God is the Guru. It is by having a child-like faith in his words that one can realize God, not through cleverness or a calculating mind. One must have faith and sincerity, and no hypocrisy. To the sincere He is very near, but He is far, far away from the hypocrite.

"We want the yearning of the child! Whatever path you follow, whether you be Hindu, Mussalman, Christian, Shakta, Vaishnava, or Brahmo, that is the one vital point. God knows the secrets of our hearts, and it matters little if a wrong path is taken—only you must have sincerity. He Himself will bring

you to the right way.

"There are some defects in every path. Every one thinks that his watch is correct, but as a matter of fact, not one shows the correct time. But that doesn't hamper one's work. Through yearning one gains the association of Sadhus, and one can correct one's watch by that standard."

Trailokya Nath Sanyal, who was one of the guests, began to sing. Soon the Master stood up and was lost in Samadhi. All stood round him in a circle. Bankim came closer and watched him attentively. He had never seen anyone in Samadhi before. After a few minutes the Master gained partial consciousness and began an ecstatic dance. The song over, he touched the ground with his head, saying, '*Bhagavata*, Bhakta, Bhagavan. Salutation to the Jnanis, Yogis, Bhaktas and all !' He sat down again, and all sat around him.

Bankim (to Sri Ramakrishna): "Sir, how can one get devotion?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "I have already told you—you must have that yearning. If one weeps for Him with the intense yearning of a child for its mother, one can realize Him.

"What will you gain by swimming on the surface? You must dive deep. The gems lie deep under water, so what's the good of keeping on the surface? A real gem has weight—it doesn't float; it goes to the bottom. If you want to collect the right gem, you must dive deep."

Bankim: "Sir, what can we do? We are tied to a cork which prevents us from diving."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Well, all sins vanish if one remembers Him. His name breaks the fetters of death. You must dive deep, or you won't get the gem."

Then he sang his favourite song, "Dive deep, dive deep, my mind !"—to which everybody listened spellbound. Bankim bowed down before the Master, intending to take his leave.

Bankim: "Sir, I am not really such a fool as you take me for. I have a request to make. Will you kindly grace my hut with your presence?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "All right, if the Lord wills."

Bankim: "There, too, you will find devotees."

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling): "Well, what sort of devotees are they?"

Then he told an amusing story about some swindling goldsmiths posing as devotees, which was much appreciated.

Sri Ramakrishna did not forget Bankim, though they never met again. And he listened to portions of one of his famous novels, *Devi Chaudhurani*, and made apposite comments thereon. He also sent Narendra and one or two of his other brilliant disciples to meet and have a talk with him.

OTHER DEVOTEES, OLD AND YOUNG

To the rest of the devotees we can make only passing reference, for want of detailed information. Ishan Chandra Mukherjee of Thanthania, Calcutta—whom we have once mentioned—was a pious and charitable man who visited the Master frequently and occasionally invited him to his house. He was held in high esteem by his friends and neighbours, who sometimes pressed him to settle their disputes. One day Sri Ramakrishna, in an exalted mood, exhorted him not to fritter away his energies that way, but to dive deep into the glories of God till he realized Him.

Navagopal Ghosh was another devotee. On his first visit he came to Dakshineswar with his wife and children. The Master was greatly attracted towards them. Navagopal did not repeat the visit and forgot all about the Master for three years. One day Sri Ramakrishna asked about him and sent an invitation to him to come to Dakshineswar.

When the news reached Navagopal he was amazed to think that Sri Ramakrishna still remembered him. He went to Dakshineswar and was cordially received. This time Navagopal was charmed with the personality of the Master, who told him that he did not need much spiritual discipline, and that by coming to Dakshineswar he would attain the goal. Navagopal and his whole family became greatly attached to Sri Ramakrishna and often came to Dakshineswar. One day when the Master was in a semi-conscious state, Ranchandra Datta told Navagopal to pray to him for any boon he liked. Navagopal prostrated himself before the Master and said, "I am immersed in worldliness, kindly tell me how I may get out of it." "Don't worry," replied the Master, remember me once a day if you can do nothing else."

Atul Krishna Ghosh, brother of Girish, at first avoided Paramahansa Deva, and even nicknamed him Rajahansa or swan. One day, in his own house, Atul was expressing his opinion of the Master to Girish, when the Master unexpectedly came to call. On seeing Atul, the Master remarked to Girish, "I used to dread your brother; but today he seems different."

At this Girish told Sri Ramakrishna about his brother's ridicule. But the Master took it kindly and said, "I take that for a compliment. The duck drinks a mixture of milk and water, but the swan, they say, is able to separate the two and drink the milk alone. He is, therefore, known as *Rajahansa* or king of the swans. Your brother, therefore, has selected a good name for me." Atul acknowledged it and asked the Master how he should address him. But the Master said, "Why, address me only by vocatives, as they do men in the street." This simplicity on the part of the Master made a deep impression on Atul's mind. Sri Ramakrishna invited him to Dakshineswar, and he accepted. He went there, visited the temples and the places of Sri Ramakrishna's *Sadhana*. Standing on the banks of the Ganga, he had a wonderful vision. After that he surrendered himself to the Master and accepted him as his guide.

Manilal Mallik of Sinduriapatti, Calcutta, was an elderly Brahmo devotee who had a great veneration for Sri Ramakrishna. Not only did he visit Dakshineswar, but he invited the Master on special days to his home. It was in response to one of these invitations that the Master attended in September, 1883, a celebration of the Brahmo Samaj there.

Once Manilal had the misfortune of losing a grown-up son. Stunned by the blow, he went straight from the cremation ground to Dakshineswar. Sri Ramakrishna was talking to a number of devotees. As soon as his eyes fell on the distracted Manilal, he inquired what the trouble was. The bereaved father sobbed out his tale of woe. Some of those present tried to console him with words of sympathy. But the Master silently listened to the old man. After some time he fell into a semi-conscious state, and suddenly standing up, sang a devotional song beginning with, "To arms! O man, for Death attacks thy house!"—accompanying it with spirited gestures. His radiant expression at once changed the whole atmosphere of the place and soothed Manilal. After the song, the Master regained normal consciousness and with great sympathy began to talk with Manilal about the natural distress on the loss of a son, referring to his own experience at the death of his nephew Akshay. He finished by saying, "But those who hold on to the Lord soon get over these calamities, like the large craft on a river when a steamer passes by." After a long and melancholy

pause—as if the misfortune had befallen himself—he drew Manilal's attention to the fleeting nature of earthly relationships and pointed out that man's only refuge lay in surrendering himself to God. Manilal was comforted and said, "That's why I came to you. I knew that no one else could assuage my sorrow."

Nityagopal Goswami, the son of Krishna Kamal Goswami, a popular Bengali author, came from Dacca. A sincere seeker for truth, he was at first a Theosophist. At Dacca he heard from Vijay Krishna Goswami about Sri Ramakrishna and started at once for Dakshineswar. The Master was eating when Nityagopal entered the room. He left the meal half-finished to accost the new-comer, so delighted was he to see him. He then retired for rest and asked Nityagopal to gently massage his feet. The young devotee found here the fountain of peace and happiness for which he had been searching so long.

Pundit Shyamapada Bhattacharya was a great scholar, from Antpur, where Baburam also was born. In August, 1885, he came to visit Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar. At dusk he went to the banks of the Ganga for his evening devotions. While so engaged, he had an extraordinary vision. Afterwards he returned to Sri Ramakrishna's room and sat on the floor. The Master said to Mahendra, "He is a fine man." The Pundit recited a hymn from the *Bhagavata*, during which Sri Ramakrishna entered into Samadhi. He placed one of his feet on the lap of the Pundit who clasped it and said, "Master, graciously illumine my heart."

Sri Ramakrishna then came to normal consciousness and said to Mahendra after the Pundit's departure, "Can you not see how my words are coming true? Those who sincerely pray to the Lord must come here."

We have seen that Balaram became a great devotee of Sri Ramakrishna. His closeness to the Master, however, irritated many of his aristocratic relatives. Failing to influence him, they gave a distorted version of the situation to his cousin, Hari Ballabh Bose, Government Pleader of Cuttack. Hari Ballabh wrote to Balaram that he would be coming shortly to Calcutta, intending to spend a few days with him. From the letter Balaram got an inkling of his cousin's displeasure at his association with Sri Ramakrishna. He was in despair to think lest his

cousin should try to take him away from Calcutta, but he was resolved that he would never leave Sri Ramakrishna. When Hari Ballabh arrived in Calcutta Balaram arranged for his comfort, but continued to visit Sri Ramakrishna as before.

The Master was then lying ill at Shyampukur, Calcutta. When Balaram went there, the Master gathered from his face that he was troubled about something. He called Balaram to him and asked what was bothering him. After hearing all, he said, "What sort of man is he ? Can you bring him here ?" "He is a good man in every way," replied Balaram, "he is educated, intelligent, generous, and devoted to God. His one defect is that he believes everything he is told, hence he has a queer idea of you. I don't know whether he will be willing to come or not." The Master said, "Then you do not bother yourself about it, call Girish." As Hari Ballabh was his classmate, Girish cheerfully agreed to bring him to the Master. The very next day (October, 1885) Girish brought Hari Ballabh and introduced him to the Master, who received him cordially and said, "I have heard of you from many people and often wished to see you. But I was afraid that you might be a sophisticated man, and I find that this is not so." Then he said to Girish, "He is as frank as a child. Do you notice his eyes ? A man cannot have such eyes unless his heart is full of devotion to God." The Master laid his hand on Hari Ballabh's arm and said, "Really you do not make me nervous ; on the contrary I look upon you as a relative." Hari Ballabh bowed down before him and taking the dust of his feet said, "That is due to your grace."

In the course of the religious discussion that followed, the Master said that faith in God, devotion, and absolute surrender were the chief means to spirituality. He asked one of his young disciples to sing a song, and as he explained its meaning to Hari Ballabh he plunged into Samadhi. After the song, it was found that two or three young men had also fallen into trance. Hari Ballabh experienced a strange emotion, and tears poured from his eyes ; he was charmed with the words of the Master as well as by his illumined face. At nightfall he took his leave, with his views about the Master altogether changed. Thereafter he visited him quite frequently and showed him great reverence.

Referring to him, Sri Ramakrishna one day remarked to M., "Well didn't I tell you of two men whom I had seen in a

trance ? One of them was Dr. Sarkar, and Hari Ballabh is the other. So you see he came."

Bhupati, a young Brahmo, heard about Sri Ramakrishna and came to Dakshineswar to meet him. At the very first meeting he became a devotee. A man of many qualities, he was loved by the Master for his simplicity and unflinching faith in God. At that time he was a student, but the more he saw of Sri Ramakrishna, the less he thought of his studies. One day he was sitting near the door of the Kali temple, singing with great fervour of the glory of God. The Master heard the song from a distance, and coming to him in a state of trance placed his foot on his chest. In the ecstasy that followed the touch, Bhupati saw standing before him his beloved Ishta Deva.

Having tasted of the sweetness of divine bliss through association with the Master, the devotees brought fresh recruits to Dakshineswar. Surendra brought his brother Girindra, a Brahmo by faith without belief in God with form. Sri Ramakrishna helped him so that he derived joy from sources hitherto unknown to him. Manomohan introduced his uncle Nabai Chaitanya. Devendranath Mazumdar brought Akshay Kumar Sen, whom the Master later on initiated. It was he who afterwards wrote a beautiful biography of the Master in Bengali verse.

Other householder devotees who used to frequent Dakshineswar were Kaviraj Mahendra nath Pal of Sinthi, Chunilal Bose of Baghbazar, Upendra Nath Mukherjee (afterwards proprietor of the *Basumati*), Kishori, the brother of M., Haramohan Mazumdar of Baranagore, and Kishori Mohan Rai of Bon Hooghly. All of them were blessed by the Master. Among some distinguished visitors we shall mention only one, viz Nilkantha Mukherjee, the famous singer and composer, whom Sri Ramakrishna particularly liked for his devotion.

As we already know, the grace of Sri Ramakrishna was abundantly showered upon young boys, whom he considered fit recipients of spiritual knowledge. Through fun and merriment, of which his mind was an inexhaustible storehouse, he, without their knowledge, gradually directed their minds towards God.

Narayan, a young Brahmin student, belonged to a well-to-do family, but his people did not like his association with Sri Ramakrishna, and beat him for visiting Dakshineswar. Still he came every now and then, and the Master, who loved him for

his sincerity and devotion to God, often paid his carriage-hire. From his physiognomy the Master prophesied success in spirituality for him. One day Sri Ramakrishna was listening to a Sankirtana in the verandah of his room, when Narayan came. Impelled by a higher power, the Master left his seat before the song was finished to feed the boy with sweets. He afterwards marvelled at his own unusual conduct and attributed it to Narayan's great potential spirituality. One day Narayan's mother came to Dakshineswar. Sri Ramakrishna tactfully softened her mind, so that she might give her son freedom to pursue a religious career.

Through the kind ministrations of Mahendra many other boys were blessed by coming in contact with the Master. Tejchandra, Haripada, Dwija, Pramatha alias Paltu, Naren Junior, and Purna were some of them. Among these boys the last two deserve special mention.

Naren Junior—whose full name was Narendra Nath Mitra—was possessed of a great spiritual temperament. Even as a boy he used to weep for God. The Master spoke highly of his keen intelligence, which reminded him of his Guru, Totapuri. Naren loved Sri Ramakrishna with his whole heart. In spite of punishment from his guardians he used to spend two or three days at a time at Dakshineswar. At the name of God he would plunge into deep trances—lasting sometimes for two hours or more. One day Sri Ramakrishna said to Dr. Mahendra Lal Sarkar, "This boy possesses an exceptionally pure soul, uncontaminated by the slightest touch of worldliness. Look how ingenuous is his laugh!" People were amazed at the yearning which Sri Ramakrishna felt for Naren Junior. If he would absent himself for some days from Dakshineswar, the Master would send for him, and when he came he fed him with his own hands. Many a time he wept and prayed for the boy to the Divine Mother!

The Master once made this significant remark to him, "It is not enough to be convinced of the existence of God. Even to have a vision of Him is not the culmination of spiritual life. You must be intimately familiar with Him—you must have direct communion with Him. Some have heard of God, others have seen Him, but only a few have thoroughly tasted Him. Many may have seen the king. But very few can entertain him

as a guest in their homes."

One day a curious incident happened. Sri Ramakrishna was in Samadhi, standing. Lest he should fall, Naren Junior hastened to support him. He had done so many times, and there was no objection because of his purity. But in this instance the Master gave a scream of pain as soon as he touched him. Naren, completely taken aback, at once let go. He was mortified, as it could mean nothing but that his mind had become impure. But Sri Ramakrishna, after he had regained consciousness, explained the matter, to the great relief of Naren. The boy had recently undergone an operation, and the wound had not yet healed up. We read in the scriptures that one with a wound in his body must not touch a divine form. In Samadhi, Sri Ramakrishna was one with the Divinity, and his automatic recoil from the touch of Naren clearly attested the truth of the scriptural dictum.

But great as Naren Junior was, Sri Ramakrishna had a greater admiration for his other disciple, Purna Chandra Ghosh. Purna was a boy of only thirteen, reading in the Vidyasagar School. His guardians were strict, and he had to meet the Master secretly. At the very first meeting Sri Ramakrishna was highly impressed by the boy, fed him and gave him instructions in prayer and meditation. He asked him to come to Dakshineswar and gave him money for carriage-hire. The Master said of him to his devotees, "Purna has some of the attributes of the Lord Narayana. He is full of Sattva. He is the last of that series of brilliant devotees who, I saw in that trance, would come to me for spiritual illumination."

Purna experienced great bliss in meeting the Master. By intuition he gained knowledge of the special relationship that was to exist between them. On their second meeting, which took place at Balaram Bose's house, the Master asked Purna his opinion of him. Purna replied with much emotion, "You are God Himself, incarnated in flesh and blood!" Sri Ramakrishna was surprised and delighted with the answer, which showed of what stuff the boy was made. He blessed Purna and initiated him into the mystery of Shakti worship.

One day Balaram asked the Master how it was that Purna had acquired such spiritual fervour in spite of his youth. Sri Ramakrishna replied, "This is the result of work in past births.

He has already passed through the preliminary stages. The body alone grows and decays, but not the Soul. Purna belongs to the special class of devotees known as Ishwarakoti. A little effort brings out their latent spirituality. A devotee of this order is like the vine of gourd or pumpkin, which bears fruit first and flower afterwards. First they realize God, and spiritual discipline comes afterwards."

After contact with the Master, Purna began to experience great waves of spiritual emotion ; tears would flow and the hair of his body stand on end. One day he wrote to Sri Ramakrishna, "I often pass sleepless nights because of excessive joy." The Master took up the letter, and as he pressed it between his palms said, "This is a good letter, for I can touch it. Others' letters I cannot touch." The Master often became exceedingly eager to meet him. One night he unexpectedly came from Dakshineswar to M.'s house to see Purna. M. himself brought the boy to him, and the Master gave him advice on spiritual matters. This holy association between the two souls bore their natural result as years rolled on.

WOMEN DEVOTEES

"We seldom looked upon Sri Ramakrishna as a member of the male sex. We always considered him as one of us. Therefore we did not feel the least constraint before him. He was our best confidant."—This was the general opinion of the women devotees of the Master of whom there were many. All of them revered the Master greatly, and some of them had the good fortune of becoming his disciples. He seemed like a dear relative and engrossed all their thoughts. Whenever any delicacy was prepared, a portion of it was set aside for Sri Ramakrishna and sent to him. They walked great distances to see him, regardless of their position or etiquette. At his bidding they even went to the market at Dakshineswar to buy things for him. He made them undergo this discipline in order to wean them gradually from the body idea. He, on his part, was free as a child with them, and sought their opinion on various matters. With the instinct of the seer he called one of them a blessed Gopi of Vrindaban because of her devotion, another a cook of Vaikuntha, the sphere of the Lord Vishnu, as a tribute to her skill in the culinary art, and so on. He read their thoughts and understood their feelings as easily as those of men. The religious practices of his earlier years may have helped him in this. And as his mind was absolutely pure, it was but natural that he evoked only the highest sentiments in them. He advised them to renounce lust and wealth and warned them against the snares of men.

Among his women devotees Sri Ramakrishna assigned a high place to the mother of Manomohan Mitra. Indeed she was a person of rare spiritual gifts. An ideal wife during the lifetime of her husband, looking upon marriage as an inviolable religious sacrament, after his death she considered herself practically dead to the world. One day she was seated in Sri Ramakrishna's room with other women, when the conversation drifted to the duty of women. The Master said that the whole duty of a woman consisted in faithful service to her husband. The chaste wife should worship him as the embodiment of God. There were not wanting women who, even after the death of

their husbands, worshipped them as Sri Krishna, the Lord of all souls. Then he told the following story: A queen, during the lifetime of her husband, wore only a pair of iron bracelets on her wrists, setting aside the desires of her relatives who pressed her to wear gold and jewellery. When the king passed away, the queen broke her iron bracelets and put on all her gold ornaments. Everyone was greatly astonished at this. In response to a friendly query she said, "When my husband was present as a perishable human figure, I used the inferior iron bracelets. Now that he is one with the supreme Self, Eternal and Immutable, I wear these valuable gold ornaments." Pointing to the mother of Manomohan the Master added, "That is the reason that she wears her gold bracelets. She cherishes the same lofty feelings towards her husband." When her son-in-law, Rakhal, became much attracted to Sri Ramakrishna, and everybody talked of his probable renunciation, she said, "It would indeed be an auspicious moment of my life if my son-in-law renounced the world in quest of God and dedicated himself to the service of monks and saints." Her regard for the Master was unbounded, and she thought nothing of dispensing with the time-honoured formalities of religion if she knew that Sri Ramakrishna wished it.

Another great woman devotee was known later as Yogin-Ma. She was a rich man's wife, but owing to family troubles was most unhappy. One day she heard from Balaram, who was a relative, of Sri Ramakrishna and took the first opportunity to go to Dakshineswar. At the sight of the Master she forgot all her sorrows and afflictions. He was glad to meet her and introduced her to the Holy Mother. From the very first Yogin-Ma surrendered herself completely at the feet of the Master; she came frequently to Dakshineswar and sometimes spent several days at a time with the Holy Mother. She was initiated by the Master and spent the greater part of the day in various religious practices. Referring to her, the Master once remarked, "She is a devotee of rare spiritual attainments. In the fulness of time, people will wonder at her many realizations." This prophecy came true; for after a short practice Yogin-Ma would fall into trances while meditating on God. Later on she became a constant companion of the Holy Mother.

Another woman devotee was a middle-aged widow, after-

wards known as Golap-Ma. She was in great grief at the death of her only daughter. Hearing of Sri Ramakrishna from Yogin-Ma, she set out for Dakshineswar and unfolded her sad tale to the Master. He became semi-conscious and in that state said, "You are fortunate. God Himself helps those who have none else in the world to call their own." The words breathed new life into her. Sri Ramakrishna accepted her as his own, and she soon tasted of the bliss of devotion. He also went with his devotees to her house. Golap-Ma was so happy at this that she could scarcely contain her joy.

The following incident, though it happened a little later, during the early stage of the Master's last illness, we shall give here. One day Golap-Ma told the Master that she knew of an expert physician who might treat his case successfully. Sri Ramakrishna, like a boy, jumped at the idea and proposed to see the doctor the next morning. He set out for Calcutta from Dakshineswar by boat, accompanied by Golap-Ma, Latu, and Kali. Reaching Calcutta, they consulted the doctor, who prescribed certain medicines. On their way back to Dakshineswar they felt very hungry. The Master inquired if any of the devotees had any money. None but Golap-Ma had any, and that was but four pice. The Master asked Kali to take it and buy something at the nearest market. Kali purchased an anna worth of sweets from Baranagore. The Master, much to the surprise of the others, ate them all. He then drank water from the Ganga and said, "Ah, I am satisfied." As the Master declared his satisfaction, the hunger of the three, who were mutely watching, vanished. They felt quite satisfied—they did not know how, nor why. A Great Yogi that he was, Sri Ramakrishna made use of his superior knowledge to feed four hungry mouths in feeding his own. We read that ages ago, Sri Krishna did the same thing but on a larger scale. Nature unfolds its secrets to the one who has access to them. Time or place makes no difference. It may be a platitude, but it seems worth repeating, that given similar conditions, incidents repeat themselves.

The Mother of Devendranath Mazumdar looked upon Sri Ramakrishna as her own child. One day she came to Dakshineswar with her son and some others, and unknown to Devendra, brought some puffed sugar pellets as an offering to the deities of Rasmani's temple. They reached the garden at noon and

found the Master seated on his smaller bedstead. All prostrated themselves before him, except the aged lady, who, regarding him as her son, did not bow. Sri Ramakrishna addressed her as mother and made her sit beside him on the bed. They talked with each other like mother and child, and the lady was so much overwhelmed with joy that she totally forgot about the little bundle of sweets. Curiously enough, Sri Ramakrishna after a while expressed a desire for that particular kind of sweetmeat. Devendra sent one of his companions to the market to purchase it. But the Master gradually became impatient, and like a child began to pull at the lady's cloth. Presently the bundle of sweetmeats was disclosed to view, much to the Master's joy. He ate them with gusto, and Devendra's mother could not check her tears as she looked on.

An aged relative of Jadunath Mallik was greatly devoted to Sri Ramakrishna and often invited him to Jadu's gardenhouse, near the Kali temple. One day she arranged her various offerings in her own room and sat in meditation. Sri Ramakrishna fell into a trance while speaking with some of his devotees. In that state he left the Kali temple and entered the room where the old lady was meditating. She opened her eyes and found the Master eating the offerings meant for her Chosen Ideal. Tears flowed from her eyes at this unexpected token of divine grace, and in a voice choked with emotion she said, "Ah, today the aspirations of my mind have been fulfilled. I have realized your true nature. Bless me that I may realize God in this very birth." Sri Ramakrishna touched her head with his foot and she experienced the rare bliss of divine communion.

The daughter of the Brahmo devotee Manilal Mallik was very pious and cherished a high regard for the Master. She was greatly distracted during meditation. One day she told the Master about it and asked his advice. He asked her whom she loved most in the world. She replied that it was her brother's child. The Master told her to meditate on the boy, thinking of him as the Baby Krishna. The lady followed this novel instruction and as a result of the concentration that ensued, was blessed in a short time with various divine visions.

Gaur-Dasi or Gauri-Ma as she is more popularly known in the circle of Sri Ramakrishna's devotees, was a remarkable lady of great devotion and renunciation. She early embraced the life

of a nun and practised the Vaishnava form of worship at Vrindaban. Learning of Sri Ramakrishna from Balaram Bose, she came to Calcutta and went to Dakshineswar. At the very first meeting, she believed the Master to be an incarnation of Sri Gauranga and became intensely devoted to him. She would often stay at Dakshineswar with the Holy Mother and sometimes cook for the Master. One day a desire came to her to experience for herself the flood of divine emotion that had been so often manifested in Sri Gauranga. Though she told no one of it, the desire was strangely fulfilled in the following way.

One morning a number of devotees arrived at Dakshineswar. Gauri-Ma cooked the meal for the Master that day and came to his room with the dish of food in her hand. Kedarnath Chatterjee was there, and Sri Ramakrishna introduced him to Gauri-Ma. Both were of the same faith, and as they looked at each other, they felt a tremendous rush of feeling. They stood gazing at each other, and large tear-drops rolled down their cheeks. At the sight of this emotion, the Master who had scarcely tasted the food, stood up. All the devotees present in the room closed in. A divine thrill pervaded the whole atmosphere, and the devotees, caught in it, forgot themselves and the world. Some began to laugh, some wept, and others sang or danced in the exuberance of joy. Some began to shake, and others rolled on the ground unconscious. In the twinkling of an eye all this came about—nobody was prepared for it. This divine intoxication continued for some time, after which Sri Ramakrishna touched and restored all to the normal state.

But undoubtedly the most marvellous of Sri Ramakrishna's relationship was with an orthodox Brahmin woman named Aghoremāni Devi, later on known as Gopālā's Mother. Widowed when quite a girl, she formed a friendship with the widow of Govinda Chandra Datta of Pataldanga, Calcutta, who had built a temple of Radha-Govinda at Kamarhati, some three miles north of Dakshineswar. Aghoremāni made this temple her home and occupied a small room just on the bank of the Ganga. Both she and the mistress of the temple led a life of extreme restraint and devotion. Aghoremāni was a woman of independent spirit, living on the interest of a small sum she possessed. She was born with Vaishnava instincts and in course of time was initiated by a Vaishnava Guru. Gopālā or Baby Krishna, was her favourite

Deity, whom she looked upon as her own child. Her little cell was singularly devoid of all comforts. She had an old copy of the *Ramayana* and her little bag with the rosary. Hour after hour, day after day, for thirty years had she sat absorbed in telling her beads there.

When one afternoon, in the year 1884, Aghoremani with two companions, went to see Sri Ramakrishna, she was about sixty years of age. The Master received them kindly, spoke on devotion and sang a few songs. He also asked them to come again. Aghoremani was much attracted to Sri Ramakrishna. "He is a nice man, a real devotee, and I must try to come again", she thought as she returned to Kamarhati. The Master praised her and one of her companions, the widow of Govinda Babu, saying that everything about them bespoke their genuine but unostentatious devotion.

Shortly after, she went to Dakshineswar again, with two or three pice worth of the most ordinary sweets. "Oh, you have come", said Sri Ramakrishna as soon as he saw her. "Give me what you have brought for me." With great hesitation Aghoremani produced the sweets, which the Master ate with relish, "Why do you spend your money in purchasing these things from the market? Prepare some sweetened coconut balls at home, and bring one or two of them when you come here. Or you may bring a little of the common dishes which you cook for yourself. I wish very much to eat things cooked by you." Aghoremani used to say later on, "Instead of speaking about God or religion, he spoke about this food or that food. I thought, 'What a queer monk! He only talks of food! And I am a poor widow. How can I feed him every day? Well, I must not come to him any more.' But as soon as I crossed the boundary of the garden, I again felt an irresistible attraction towards him. With great difficulty could I persuade myself to return to Kamarhati." A few days later she again came to Dakshineswar on foot, with some curry of her own making. Sri Ramakrishna ate it with great pleasure and extolled her skill in cooking.

During the next three or four months she went to Dakshineswar every now and then. She would share with the Master any special dish which she cooked; he would eat with great relish and ask for more. Sometimes the widow would think

in disgust, "O Gopala ! Is this the result of my constant prayers ? You have brought me to a monk who always hankers for food. I shall never come here again." But she could not resist his attraction, which made itself felt as soon as she left. Sri Ramakrishna went once to Kamarhati, praised the regular service of the deities there, and during a Kirtana fell into frequent trances.

One morning, at 3 o'clock, in the spring of 1885, Aghoremani, according to her usual routine, sat to tell her beads. After the Japa she was about to surrender the fruits of it to her Chosen Ideal, when she was startled to find that Sri Ramakrishna was sitting on her left, with his right fist clenched. She thought in wonder, "What is this ! What on earth could bring him here at this hour ?" We shall tell of her experience in her own words:¹

"While I looked at him wondering how he came there, he kept on smiling. Picking up courage I caught hold of his left hand ; suddenly the figure vanished and in place of it appeared the real Gopala, of this size (indicating it), who crawled towards me and raising one arm, with his eyes fixed on me, (O the beauty of it !) lisped, 'Ma, give me butter !' I was so surprised ! I cried aloud with joy. It was a lonely place, or a crowd would have gathered. I said weeping, 'Alas, I am a poor and helpless widow. Where shall I get cream and butter for you, my child ?' But Gopala would not listen to me. 'Give me something to eat,' he said again and again. Weeping I got up and brought him some dry coconut candies. 'Gopala, my darling,' I said, 'I offer you this wretched thing, but don't give me such a poor thing in return.' I could not perform Japa that day. Gopala sat on my lap, snatched my rosary away, jumped on my shoulders and moved about in the room ! As soon as the day broke, I hastened like an insane woman to Dakshineswar. Gopala accompanied me, resting his head on my shoulder. Pressing him against my breast I walked all the way. His tiny ruddy feet I clearly saw hanging over my breast."

Golap-Ma was present on the occasion. We describe what followed in her words:

"It was seven or half past seven in the morning. I was

¹ This is one of those happenings for which no explanation is attempted.

sweeping the Master's room, when I heard somebody advancing towards it crying, 'Gopala, Gopala !' The voice, which seemed familiar, came nearer and nearer. At last I found it was Aghoremani—almost mad, with dishevelled hair, staring eyes, and the end of her cloth trailing on the ground. Dead to all considerations of the body or the outside world, she entered the room through the eastern door. Sri Ramakrishna was then seated on his smaller bedstead.

"I was speechless with wonder to see her in that state. The Master, in the meantime, had fallen into a trance. Aghoremani drew near and sat beside him. He like a child, sat on her lap. Tears were flowing profusely from her eyes. She had brought cream, butter, and other delicacies with her, with which she was feeding the Master. I was extremely surprised, for never before had I seen the Master touching a woman in a state of trance. I only heard that long long ago he used to sit on the lap of his teacher, the Bhairavi Brahmani, as her child, when she was inspired with the sentiments of Yashoda, the mother of Krishna. After some time the Master was restored to normal consciousness and returned to his bedstead. But the floodgate of emotion had been opened in the heart of Aghoremani, and she was still on another plane of consciousness. In rapturous ecstasy she danced about the room. Noticing this the Master said to me with a smile, "Look at her. She is steeped in bliss. Her mind has fled to the region of Gopala'."

Flooded with emotion, Aghoremani began to talk with Sri Ramakrishna in words which were scarcely intelligible to the outsider. "Here is Gopala, in my arms."—"Now he enters into you."—"There, he has emerged again."—"Come, my darling, to your afflicted mother." Thus did she describe the movements of the nimble Gopala. How could she remain steady in such paroxysms of joy? From that day forth Aghoremani came to be called Gopala's Mother. Sri Ramakrishna warmly congratulated her on this unique realization. To quiet her, he began to stroke her chest, and shared with her whatever dainties he had. Even while partaking of them, she, still in a state of ecstasy, said, "Gopala, my dear, your mother has led a most unhappy life on earth. She had to earn her livelihood by spinning. Is that why you are so loving today?"

After keeping her the whole day at Dakshineswar and

making her bathe and eat, the Master sent her back to Kamarhati in the evening. The Baby Krishna of her vision also went with her, nestled in her arms. Reaching her cell, she sat to tell beads as before, but it was impossible. The beloved object of her meditation and prayer—in whose search she had spent her whole life—was gambolling before her ! She went to bed with Gopala by her side. She had a hard bed without a pillow, but Gopala began to fret for a pillow. So she placed his tiny head upon her arm and drawing him close to her tried to console him saying, "Pass this night thus, my child, and tomorrow morning I will get you a soft pillow."

The next day Gopala's Mother set about collecting some dry wood in order to cook for her Gopala. The child accompanied her and helped her in her work ! Then began the cooking, and the naughty child began to play tricks on her. The adoring mother sometimes fondled him, and sometimes administered a rebuke.

A few days after, Gopala's Mother came to Dakshineswar, and after seeing Sri Ramakrishna, went to the Holy Mother in the concert-room. She told her beads as usual and on the completion of it was saluting her Deity, when the Master came. He said to her, "Why do you tell your beads so much now ? Haven't you got enough realization already ?"

The lady: "Shall I stop it then ? Have I finished everything ?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes, you have."

The lady: "Everything ?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes, everything."

The lady: "Indeed ! Do you really mean that I have finished everything ?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes, you have finished all your spiritual exercises, so far as you yourself are concerned. But you may, if you like, pray for the welfare of this body (meaning himself)."

Referring to this incident the venerable lady afterwards said, "Hearing this from his lips, I threw my rosary and the little bag into the Ganga. For Gopala's sake (she used to address the Master with this epithet) I repeated the name of God on my fingers only. Long after, I procured another rosary. I had to spend the day somehow, and this was the best way to keep myself engaged. And so I tell my beads even now."

So after years of steady practice, Gopala's Mother attained her goal. Her visit to Dakshineswar became more frequent. Her hitherto extreme scrupulousness in matters of food and cleanliness gradually lessened ; orthodox methods became impossible to her. Gopala now became her visible teacher. The Divine Baby wished to eat every now and then ; sometimes he put a part of the food into her mouth. How could she refuse it ? Gopala wept if she did so. She was convinced, besides, that this was all Ramakrishna's doing, and that he was really her Gopala, and she felt no hesitation in accepting the food touched by him.

Aghoremani spent a couple of months in this uninterrupted communion with God. During all this time Gopala did not leave her for a moment. It is only the very fortunate few who can live at such dizzy spiritual heights for so long. Sri Ramakrishna once said to her, "You have achieved the impossible. Such a realization as yours is rare in this age." Perhaps it was the will of God that she should be spared a few years more in the world, to serve as a glorious example of the intimate relationship which it is possible to establish with God. After two months the vision became interrupted and less vivid, but she could always see him during meditation.

Every year Balaram Bose used to celebrate the Car festival in his house at Baghbazar, and with some of his devotees the Master was invited on that occasion. The following incident took place in the year 1885 during one of those festivals.

The Master arrived in the morning with some devotees. Some women devotees came there to take advantage of this opportunity of seeing the Master. At a suggestion from Sri Ramakrishna, Balaram sent a man to bring Gopala's Mother from Kamarhati. In the afternoon the Master sat in the parlour conversing with the devotees. Darkness was falling, when suddenly the master fell into a trance, assuming the posture of Baby Krishna as shown in the picture. His two knees and one hand rested on the ground ; the other hand was raised, and the face was turned up as if he were expecting someone. Nobody understood the reason for this sudden change. A few minutes after, the carriage of Gopala's Mother drew up before the house, and the fortunate lady found Sri Ramakrishna in the posture of her Chosen Ideal. Those assembled realized that it was her

devotion that had influenced the Master. "I don't like this stiff posture," said Gopala's Mother. "My Gopala should laugh and play and walk and run. But what is this ! He has become stiff as a log. I don't like to see this sort of Gopala !"

Sri Ramakrishna stayed at Balaram's house for two days. On the third morning he set out for Dakshineswar. Gopala's Mother and Golap-Ma accompanied him. The ladies of Balaram's family presented Aghoremāni with a few pieces of cloth and some utensils, which were put into the boat. When the boat had gone a little distance, the Master's eyes fell on the bundle, and he asked what was in it. When he learned of its contents he gravely remarked to Golap-Ma, "He alone realizes God who renounces everything for His sake. The devotee who is simply satisfied with another man's hospitality and returns without having his hands filled with additional presents, sits very close to God." He did not exchange a single word with Gopala's Mother, but kept looking at her bundle. She was stung with remorse and thought of throwing it away. Sri Ramakrishna was usually very kind, but he could be implacable when necessary. The method of punishment was usually very simple—a little difference, or at the most, a mild remonstrance. His super-human love did the rest.

Reaching Dakshineswar, Gopala's Mother went to the Holy Mother and said anxiously, "Gopala is angry with me over this bundle of things. What shall I do ? I shall distribute them here instead of taking them home." The Holy Mother consoled the old lady and said, "Don't worry, mother. Let him say what he will. There is none in the world to help you. It is because you require these things that you have accepted them." Nevertheless, Gopala's Mother gave away some of the things. Then she cooked some curries for the Master and went to feed him, but not without some apprehension. Sri Ramakrishna seeing her penitence never referred again to the matter, much to her relief. She returned cheerfully to Kamarhati in the evening.

After the realization, the old lady's scruples about caste and other considerations in regard to certain of Sri Ramakrishna's devotees also gradually lessened. Ever since her conviction of the identity of Sri Ramakrishna and Gopala, she used to see him more often than Gopala at the time of meditation. Through him Gopala would instruct her. At first she was anxious at not

seeing the Gopala form and one day actually said to Sri Ramakrishna, "Gopala, why have you punished me like this? What offence have I committed that I no longer see you in the Baby form?" The Master consoled her and said, "It is impossible for the physical body to survive long in this Kali Yuga, if the mind be constantly attuned to the highest plane of consciousness." It was indeed a fact that for the two months immediately following her realization she lived in quite another world, was almost oblivious of the body, and went through her daily routine automatically, by the sheer force of habit.

The Master's love and esteem for this saintly woman cannot be described. At that time many businessmen used to visit him and present him with sugar-candy and fruits, which he seldom ate himself or gave to his devotees. He used to say that behind these offerings there were always some gross selfish motives, which were sure to contaminate the minds of those who partook of them. But he made two exceptions. One of these was Narendra, whose burning illumination was proof against all impurity, and the other, Gopala's Mother, who had raised above all earthly taint. One day she came to see the Master with some other women devotees. When he saw her he began to caress her like a child. Pointing to her he said to those present, "Ah, there is nothing inside this body except God. He fills it through and through." Gopala's Mother stood silent. She even allowed the Master to touch her feet. Then he began to feed her, whereupon she said, "Why are you so fond of feeding me?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "You also fed me with many things in the past."

The lady: "In the past? When?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "In your previous births."

As she was leaving for Kamarhati in the evening, the Master asked her to accept a large quantity of sugar-candy, the gift of the businessmen. She said, "Why do you give me so much sugar-candy?" The Master touched her chin with great tenderness and said, "Well, you were molasses before, then you became sugar, and now you are sugar-candy. Therefore, eat sugar-candy and rejoice."

One day Gopala's Mother and Narendra Nath were present at Dakshineswar. Nothing could present a more striking con-

trast than those two. Sri Ramakrishna, with his unsurpassed sense of humour, could not resist the temptation of setting these two devotees to compare notes. He asked Gopala's Mother to recount her experiences before Narendra Nath. "But will there not be harm in telling them?" She asked, for the Master had once warned her not to divulge them, even to himself. Encouraged by the Master, she narrated, amid tears, all those thrilling incidents of her life which seemed miraculous. Now, beneath his rationalistic veneer Narendra Nath possessed an inexhaustible fund of devotion and religious fervour, and as he heard the recital, he could not check his tears. The old lady now and then would interrupt her story to say, "My son, you are learned and intelligent, and I am a poor, illiterate widow. I don't understand anything. Tell me if you consider my visions of Gopala to be real." Every time Narendra answered that they were all true—to the very letter.

FAREWELL TO DAKSHINESWAR

There is a liquid beauty in the rising sun, there is a royal splendour in its midday blaze, and there is also an exquisite grace in its setting glow. So it is with the life of a great man. There is a sweetness in its childhood and adolescence, there is resplendence in its maturity, and again there is a deep pathos in its last days. We have followed the course of the Master's life through its early stage and growth to maturity. Now we must turn our attention to the closing scenes.

During the sultry months of the year 1885, the Master suffered a great deal from the terrible heat, which was alleviated by the ice which the devotees brought to him daily. But this frequent use of ice produced a pain in the throat which was at first so trifling as to pass unnoticed. But in a month it became so much aggravated, specially whenever the Master talked or after Samadhi, that the disciples grew alarmed and called in Dr. Rakhal Chandra Halder of Bowbazar, a specialist in diseases of the throat. He prescribed some medicine and advised the Master not to talk much or to fall into trances. But it was very difficult to carry out these instructions.

In a previous chapter it was told how the Master, during his Sadhana period, often used to attend the great Vaishnava festival at Panihati, a few miles north of Dakshineswar, and would fall into trance. This year he proposed to go there with his young devotees who had never seen this "emporium of joy and chanting of the Lord's name," as he called it. This was directly contrary to the advice of the doctor, and the older disciples tried to dissuade him from going. The Master, however, silenced them by saying, "We shall go after early breakfast, and remain there for an hour or two. That won't do much harm. And I shall take precautions against falling into trances."

On the morning of the appointed day, the devotees, about twenty-five in number, came to Dakshineswar in two boats, ready to accompany the Master, for whom a separate boat had been engaged. A few women devotees also were to join the party. The Holy Mother, then at Dakshineswar, asked Sri Ramakrishna, through one of the women, if she, too, might go.

The Master said, "You are all going, are you not? Well, if she likes, she may go." The Holy Mother took the hint and decided not to go.

The boats reached Panihati about noon. Around the ancient peepul tree on the Ganga, there was a large concourse of men and women, and parties of Vaishnavas were singing here and there. Narendra, Balaram, Girish, Ramchandra, M., and other devotees entreated the Master again and again to keep aloof from the singing parties. Sri Ramakrishna, with his devotees, walked to the house of Mani Sen, the zemindar of the place, who received them warmly.

The two chief places of interest at Panihati are the temple of Radhakanta adjoining the house of Mani Babu, and the abode of Raghav Pundit, a devoted follower of Sri Gauranga, situated a mile off. The festival itself commemorates the feast given by Raghunath Das, another distinguished disciple of Sri Gauranga, to Nityananda and his party. It was here that this God-intoxicated son of a wealthy nobleman was blessed by Nityananda and permitted to renounce wife and home and take shelter at the feet of Sri Gauranga at Puri.

After a little rest, the Master and his devotees visited the deities in the temple. In the courtyard a party of singers was chanting the name of God. Just then a man, adorned in all the insignia of a Vaishnava, came to the spot, rosary in hand, and began to shout and dance with the musicians, imitating a devotee in an exalted mood. Sri Ramakrishna at once saw through the sham. He was in perfect control of his feelings; but in the twinkling of an eye, he broke loose from the ring of his devotees and stood in the midst of the singing party in a state of Samadhi. Narendra and others closed round him in haste. Now the Master danced in wild ecstasy, again he stood statue-like in Samadhi. While dancing, he advanced and retreated in quick steps in time with the music. The grace of his movements and the divine fervour which they expressed were unique. The presence of the Master increased the enthusiasm of the singers a hundredfold, and they chanted the Lord's name with great fervour. After half an hour the Master became conscious of the outside world. The devotees tried to separate him from the band of singers, so that he might return quickly to the boat after visiting the seat of Raghav Pundit, but the singers

followed. The Master advanced a few steps and then fell into a trance. Regaining a little consciousness he proceeded again, and fell into Samadhi. Thus it went on. The progress, therefore, was very slow.

The exquisite beauty of Sri Ramakrishna's person on this day, during the state of trance, beggars all description. He seemed taller and lighter in complexion than usual. His countenance shone with a celestial glow ; and dignity, compassion, peace, and bliss were written on it. His smile acted like a magic spell upon the spectators, who forgot everything else. His orange silk cloth set off his beauty. Even his immediate attendants were astonished at the wonderful transfiguration. Gradually other musical parties were caught up in the contagion of fervour. The huge procession slowly moved on towards Raghav Pundit's house.

Just before Sri Ramakrishna's party reached its destination a significant thing happened. The women devotees in the party had brought some Prasad for the Master. All on a sudden, a rogue posing as a Vaishnava appeared, snatched a pot from the hands of one of them, and feigning divine emotion, put a little of the offering into the mouth of the Master, who was in a state of trance. At this profane touch a shudder passed through his whole body. His Samadhi broke, and he spat out the food in abhorrence and washed his mouth. He then took a grain of Prasad from another pot and had the rest distributed among the devotees. The intruder slipped away in the crowd.

Traversing the distance of half a mile in three hours, Sri Ramakrishna reached the seat of Raghav, saw the images of the gods there, and took a little rest. Gradually the crowd dispersed, and the devotees conducted the Master to his boat. They were about to start, when Nabai Chaitanya of Konnagar was seen running towards them. He had heard about the Master's arrival at the festival and had been searching for him. Finding the Master in the boat he threw himself at his feet and wept piteously praying for his blessing. Sri Ramakrishna was pleased with his zeal and devotion and in a state of trance touched him. Immediately Nabai began to dance with joy, and saluted Sri Ramakrishna again and again. The Master stroked Nabai's back, gave him advice, and restored him to his normal state. That day Nabai found a new meaning in religion, and placing the

charge of his family upon his son, spent the remaining years of his life as a recluse on the bank of the Ganga, engaged in prayer and meditation. Henceforth old Nabai would fall into trances during Sankirtana, and his emotion became an inspiration to those who came in contact with them.

Sri Ramakrishna returned to Dakshineswar in the evening. The devotees took leave of him and returned to Calcutta. The women intended to spend the night with the Holy Mother, as there was the festival of Snana-yatra on the following day. At night, while taking his supper, the Master remarked to one of them, "It was well that she (the Holy Mother) did not go with us, for in that great gathering everybody was watching me on account of my frequent Bhava-Samadhi. They would have made fun at our expense.¹ I admire her intelligence." Then he cited the following incident. "When the Marwari devotee Lakshmi Narayan wanted to present me with ten thousand rupees, I felt as if my head were being sawn through. I prayed, 'Mother, after such a length of time you come to tempt me again !' In order to test the trend of her (the Holy Mother's) mind, I said to her, 'Well, he wants to present me with this money. I have refused it, and he wants to give it to you. Why don't you accept it?' Her immediate reply was, 'It is impossible, for my acceptance would be the same as yours. It will have to be spent in your service, and you will be the virtual owner of it. People respect you because of your renunciation. So we cannot accept the money on any account.' I gave a sigh of relief at her words."

When this was reported to the Holy Mother she said, "From the nature of his reply when I asked to go to Panihati I understood that he did not desire it. Had he done so, he would have said, 'Yes, certainly.' So I changed my plan."

That night the Master had no sleep owing to a burning sensation over his entire body, probably due to the touch of promiscuous people. The next day being a special day, he had a crowd of visitors of both sexes. Among them was a woman who came to him for advice in her domestic affairs, and she marred the joy of the occasion by being too insistent. At meal-time he did not talk with her, nor did he eat freely as on other days. Later on he remarked, "In other years on this day I used to have repeated Bhava-Samadhi, and the divine ecstasy would

¹ Because a monk's renunciation of the world includes wife and family.

last for two or three days. But today I had nothing of the kind. The presence of people with profane thoughts has prevented the mind from soaring upward."

The Master's participation in the Panihati festival aggravated his throat trouble. The weather had not been good, and the doctor said that on account of exposure and the frequent recurrence of Bhava-Samadhi, the ailment had taken a turn for the worse. He warned the devotees that the disease might prove obstinate if proper precautions were not taken. The devotees resolved to keep a strict watch in future. The Master, however, like a boy, shifted the whole responsibility of the trip on to Ram and some other elderly devotees, saying, "I would not have gone there, had they urged me to stay here." One day, about this time, a devotee came to Dakshineswar and found the Master sitting quietly on his bedstead, with medicine painted on his throat. He looked sullen, like a boy under strict orders not to stir out. On being asked what the trouble was, the Master said, "The pain is worse, and the doctor has told me not to talk much." "We hear," said the devotee, "that you had been to Panihati. That may be the reason for the aggravation." "Yes," the Master replied fretfully, "it was raining, and the road was muddy, yet Ram took me there and led me a pretty dance the whole day." The devotee consoled him by saying that a little care for a few days would set everything right. The Master was pleased and said, "But how can I be silent altogether? You have come from such a distance, and may I not exchange a few words with you?" The devotee said, "You need not, sir. We shall talk enough after you get well." But the Master forgot the doctor's remonstrances as well as his own pain and conversed as usual.

Another month passed, and there was no improvement. On days of the full and the new moon, the pain became more acute; it was impossible for him to eat solid food. The doctors diagnosed the disease as "Clergyman's sore throat". Proper medicines and diet were prescribed. The Master carried out the injunctions faithfully, except on two points, viz checking the divine ecstasies and giving rest to the vocal organs. As soon as he spoke of God, he lost all consciousness of the body and fell into Samadhi. Nor would he stop speaking to people who, afflicted by the world, came to him for solace. The number of

such people was considerable, and was daily increasing. Ever since his meeting with Keshab in the year 1875, he had tried without ceasing to deliver his message to the world, and observed no regularity about food or rest. His sleep was much disturbed. He would get out of bed several times during the night, and arise at 4 o'clock, to spend the hours of the early dawn in reciting the Lord's name and in meditation. No wonder his health was broken.

Though he himself never referred to this breakdown, his consciousness of it could be easily inferred from his occasional complaints to the Divine Mother. For instance, shortly before this illness, he was heard one day as he was in an ecstatic state to say to Her, "Why dost Thou bring here these worthless people who are like milk adulterated with five times its quantity of water? My eyes are almost gone by blowing into the fire to dry up the water, and my health is shattered. This is beyond my power to do. Go and do it Thyself if Thou hast a fancy to it. Or bring only good men whom I can arouse by a few words." Another day, noticing the increasing rush of newcomers, he said in the same mood, "How is it that Thou art bringing such a crowd here? I find no time even to bathe or eat. (Pointing to his own body) This is but a perforated drum, and if you beat it day and night, how long will it last?" Still another day—as the reader knows—he prayed to Her to give some power to Vijay and others so that they might, to a certain extent, prepare the newcomers, before they came to him.

Indeed, about the latter part of the year 1884, the name of Sri Ramakrishna had become widely known to the Calcutta public, and hundreds of people were attracted to him. Notwithstanding his physical troubles he was as enthusiastic as even in helping seekers after truth. He intuitively understood their emotional attitudes and whenever he found one with real aspirations for God, he would be fired with a divine fervour and push him on towards the goal by precepts, or arouse his dormant spirituality by a touch. The passion for God would be redoubled and the seeker would progress easily and smoothly under the Master's guidance. This service to humanity, described as the greatest and noblest in the scriptures, he rendered disinterestedly and whole-heartedly up to the last moment of his life.

Still another month wore away. The disease proved more and more obstinate. The devotees were at a loss to know what to do, when an incident occurred which shaped their future course. A lady one day invited the devotees of Sri Ramakrishna to supper. Though she knew that the Master's condition might prevent acceptance, still she sent an invitation to him by a devotee to come, even if it were only for a few minutes, so eager was she to have him present. The messenger returned with the report that the Master could not come as there had been bleeding from the throat. Narendra, Ram, Girish, Kalipada, Devendra, Mahendra, and others who were present were alarmed at this news, and after consulting together it was agreed that they should hire a house in Calcutta and bring the Master there for treatment. Narendra Nath was much dejected during the meal. To a friend's query he replied, "Perhaps the object round which our joys are centred is going to slip away from us. I have learned from medical books and some medical friends whom I have consulted, that this kind of throat disease seems to confirm my suspicion. No remedy has yet been discovered for this disease."

The very next day, some of the older devotees went to Dakshineswar and proposed to the Master that he should go to Calcutta for treatment, and he agreed. A small two-storied house, commanding a view of the Ganga, was engaged in Durga Charan Mukherjee Street, Baghbazar. Three days later the Master came to Calcutta. He saw the house, but accustomed as he was to the open air of Dakshineswar, he did not like it. "Have they brought me here as they do with dying people in their last moments?" he said, and straightway walked to Balam Bose's house. Balam received him warmly and requested him to stay there until a suitable lodging could be found. The Master consented.

The devotees began the search for a suitable house and in the meantime invited some eminent Vaid¹ of Calcutta to diagnose the case. Gangaprasad and some other Kavirajas consulted together and diagnosed the case as "Rohini" or cancer. The devotees, getting no hope from the Vaid, thought it best to have him treated by a homoeopath.

The news of Sri Ramakrishna's arrival in Calcutta soon

¹Physicians who follow the Hindu methods of treatment.

spread to all quarters and drew crowds of visitors to Balaram's house. In spite of the doctor's warning and the eager entreaties of his devotees, the Master very often spoke with these people and solved their problems. His unabated zeal for religious discourse made his illness seem as a pretext to come to Calcutta, in order to reach the spiritual aspirants unable to go to Dakshineswar. From morning till bedtime, with a short recess of about a couple of hours at noon, he talked and talked, answering eager questions, and illuminating by his frequent trances the hearts of innumerable devotees. He stayed there only a week, but it was a week of great spiritual enlightenment. The following incident will illustrate this. One day, the room was packed with visitors, and Girish and Kalipada were singing a song telling of Sri Chaitanya's passionate love for humanity. At the western end of the hall sat the Master facing the east in Samadhi. His countenance wore that heavenly smile which characterized him when he was in that State. His right leg, slightly raised, was extended before him, and a devotee, with closed eyes and face and chest bathed in tears, was holding it with great care. After the song was over, Sri Ramakrishna regained partial consciousness, and bade the man before him repeat the name of Sri Krishna Chaitanya thrice.

In a few days the parlour of Gokul Chandra Bhattacharya in Shyampukur Street was engaged, and it was decided to place the master under the treatment of Dr. Mahendra Lal Sarkar.

SHYAMPUKUR

Sri Ramakrishna entered the new premises at Shyampukur in the beginning of October, 1885. The building had two large rooms and two smaller ones on the first floor. One of the bigger rooms was used as the parlour, and in the other the Master lived. Of the two smaller ones, one was used as a sleeping room by the devotees and the other by the Holy Mother when she came there. Near the exit to the roof was a small covered-in square space where the Holy Mother stayed during the day and prepared the Master's food.

According to previous arrangement, Dr. Mahendra Lal Sarkar was entrusted with the treatment of the Master. Long ago, during the lifetime of Mathur, he had met Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar. He examined the patient carefully, prescribed for him, and asked the devotees to make a report of the patient's condition every morning. When he learned that the devotees who had brought the Master to Calcutta for treatment were defraying all expenses, he offered his service free as a labour of love.

But even the greatest of physicians could not quiet the anxious devotees. They became convinced of the necessity of securing able hands to prepare the Master's food and to nurse him by night as well as by day. Money could not possibly solve these problems. It could be done only through the combined efforts of the Holy Mother and the young devotees. But there were great difficulties in the way. In the first place, there were no women's quarters in the house. How could the Holy Mother live there? Secondly, the young devotees were mostly students; how could they give their time regularly at night, without incurring the displeasure of their guardians? Moreover, some of the devotees remembered the shyness of the Holy Mother and despaired of her coming to Shyampukur. In their extremity they laid the proposals before the Master, who only said, "Will she be able to accommodate herself here? However, explain everything to her, and see if she wants to come." News was accordingly sent to the Holy Mother at Dakshineswar.

The Holy Mother, however, despite her bashfulness, had

thoroughly taken to heart the Master's salutary teaching about accommodating oneself to circumstances. So when she learned that for want of a competent person to cook, the Master's illness might take a serious turn, she threw aside all considerations of personal comfort and volunteered to come at once to Shyampukur and undertake the task. It is marvellous how she managed to live for more than two months in that house amid such uncongenial surroundings. As the house had only one bath-room, she had to get up at three o'clock in the morning to take her bath and then steal into her narrow place near the roof. There she would prepare the food and send word through Gopal Senior or Latu that it was ready, and would either take it herself to the Master, or if circumstances did not permit, send it by the devotees. She took her dinner and rest at noon in that garret, and after 11 p.m., when the whole household was asleep, she came down to her bedroom to snatch a few hours' sleep after the day's hard labour. Fortified with the expectation of the Master's recovery, she did her work silently and cheerfully, and few among even the regular visitors knew that she was there as the Master's chief nurse.

When the question of diet was settled, attention was given to the matter of night nursing. Narendra Nath took this charge upon himself and began to pass the nights at Shyampukur. Fired by his example, a few sturdy youths such as Gopal Junior (a new recruit), Kali, and Shashi lent their aid. Narendra's sacrifice for the sake of the Master, his inspiring talks and association with them made an indelible impression upon their minds, and they banished all selfishness, resolving to consecrate their lives to the noble ideal of service unto the Guru and realization of God. So long as their guardians did not know of these resolutions, no objection was raised to their attendance on Sri Ramakrishna. But when, with the aggravation of the Master's illness, these boys devoted their entire attention to his service, neglecting their studies and not going home even for meals, the guardians became alarmed and had recourse to various means, fair or foul, to bring them back. But the boys, with the glorious object-lesson of Narendra Nath before them, stood firm as rocks. It is interesting to note that though only four or five were attracted to this labour of love at its initial stage at Shyampukur, the number of such workers was almost

quadrupled towards the last.

But the devotees were still anxious. They had learned from various eminent physicians that the disease, even if there were a possibility of cure, was likely to prove obstinate. Whence would come the funds for protracted treatment? Among the householder devotees who had brought the Master to Calcutta for treatment, there was not one who had means enough, after maintaining his own family, to undertake single-handed the expenses of the Master and his attendants. It was their faith in the superhuman personality of the Master that had enabled them to shoulder this great responsibility so far. Would they have to give before the stern reality of the world? But whenever their faith wavered, they would find in Sri Ramakrishna such unprecedented evidences of spiritual power, that their misgivings would be scattered to the winds, and their hearts filled with new strength and vigour. They realized that he whom they had accepted as the goal of their life, was not only a superman, but was the Lord Himself in the guise of man. They even thought that he had feigned illness in order to give them the opportunity to serve him. Then why this baseless apprehension, this anxiety for the stringency of funds? Sri Ramakrishna himself would provide the means.

That this was the real working of their minds was shown by their open discussion of the matter among themselves. One thought of mortgaging his homestead, another of pawning the family ornaments, for was not this what they would do in case of domestic troubles? A third would silently curtail his daily household expenses and ungrudgingly contribute the mite thus saved to the service of the Master. Inspired by such sentiments, Surendra undertook to pay the house-rent, and Balaram, Ramchandra, Mahendra, Girish, and other devotees divided among themselves the total cost of the Master's establishment at Shyampukur and Cossipore. The selfless enthusiasm of the devotees centred on a common object of adoration, bound them together indissolubly, and the Ramakrishna Brotherhood though it had its origin at Dakshineswar, owed most of its growth to the holy associations of Shyampukur and the Cossipore garden. It was natural, therefore, that some of the devotees believed that the main reason for the Master's disease was the consummation of this solidarity among the brothers.

The devotees formed themselves into three groups according to the interpretation of the reasons for Sri Ramakrishna's illness. The opinion of the first group—that it was all a play—has already been given. Girish Chandra Ghosh with his robust optimism was the leader of this class. The second group thought that the Master was but an instrument in the hands of the Divine Mother, who, to fulfil some mysterious purpose of Her own, calculated to promote the welfare of humanity, had temporarily put him in this condition, and that, perhaps, he himself was unable to fathom that mystery. The third group held that the body of Sri Ramakrishna, like all other material things, was subject to the laws of nature ; so it was idle to ascribe an esoteric meaning to his illness. They would take a rational view of the matter until there was some revelation to the contrary. They would do their utmost to bring about his recovery, and through Sadhana would try to emulate the lofty ideals for which he stood. It was Narendra Nath who, as the spokesman of the young disciples of the Master, held to the last view. Though differing from one another in this matter, all the devotees were agreed in one respect, viz that by carrying the Master's instructions into practice and winning his favour through unstinted service, they would be able to achieve the highest goal in this life. This it was that kept their regard for one another intact in spite of differences of opinion at the time and during subsequent events. We shall now record some of those wonderful manifestations of the Master's spiritual power that stimulated the faith of his devotees to go on against overwhelming odds.

We have seen how Dr. Mahendra Lal Sarkar took up in right earnest the task of treating the Master. For the first few days he used to attend thrice a day to study the course of the disease. After the examination was over, he would spend hours with Sri Ramakrishna in various religious discourses. As a result, he soon recognized the great spirituality of the Master and considered it a privilege to be in his company. One day the Master began to thank him for his kindness, but he interrupted him saying, "Do you think that I spend so much time here for your sake alone ? I have a personal motive in it. I derive great joy from your company. I never had the opportunity of association with you before—I was busy with other things. To be

frank, I like you for your unflinching devotion to truth. But, alas, how often I find people professing one thing and doing another, which I abhor. Don't think that I am flattering you. I am no respecter of persons ; even if my father is wrong, I tell him so to his face. I am notorious for bluntness." "Yes, I have heard that," said the Master with a smile, "but though you have been coming here for a pretty long time, I have had as yet no indication of that." The doctor smiled and said, "We must both thank our stars for that. Had anything in your conduct appeared hypocritical, it would not have passed without comment."

In the course of the ensuing conversation the doctor condemned those who put limitations upon God. Sri Ramakrishna was pleased with this remark and said, "You are quite right. I cannot bear such foolish statements." He then asked a devotee to sing a song of Ramprasad, which he explained to the doctor. The Master hastened to correct an inaccuracy of the singer saying, "No, you reverse the words. It ought to be; 'My mind sees it plainly, but the heart, alas, will not be satisfied !' 'The mind tries to understand God and soon realizes that it is beyond its power to comprehend the eternal Reality. But the heart refuses to be convinced. It is restless to attain Him.'" The doctor was charmed with the interpretation and exclaimed, "Quite right ! The mind, like a vulgar fellow, despairs at the slightest difficulty, but the heart, undeterred, pushes on in the search for truth."

While listening to the song one or two young devotees fell into trance. The doctor examined their pulse and said, "It appears that they have no outward consciousness." Sri Ramakrishna gently passed his hand over their chest, and uttering in their ears the name of God, brought them back to consciousness. Dr. Sarkar said to the Master, "It all seems to be your handiwork." The Master replied with a smile, "No, it is due to His grace. The minds of these young men have not been scattered on wife, children, wealth, or fame. So they are easily concentrated in the name of God." The doctor incidentally remarked that it was a little learning that was dangerous, but profundity of knowledge always made one humble. To this Sri Ramakrishna replied, "Yes, secular knowledge generally makes one dogmatic. Vanity of learning is one of the bondages of man. It is through divine grace that with much erudition you

are still free from it." Dr. Sarkar said excitedly, "Why, I know almost nothing. I don't feel any humiliation in learning from others, even from these young men, and I can even touch their feet." "I also tell them," said the Master, "as long as I live, I can learn from others." Then referring to the doctor he said to the devotees, "You see his humility. That shows the real worth of the man." The doctor then took his leave for the day.

Thus by degrees Dr. Mahendra Lal became more and more attached to Sri Ramakrishna. The Master was anxious to bring him to the realization of God. He caused some of his most brilliant disciples such as Mahendra, Girish, and Narendra, to associate with him. As a result of this the doctor saw the performance of Girish Chandra's *Life of Buddha* on the stage, and several other religious plays of his. Delighted with Narendra Nath's conversation, he invited him one day to dinner. Shortly after, at Shyampukur, at his request Narendra sang for him. The doctor was charmed, warmly embraced the boy and blessed him heartily. He said to Sri Ramakrishna, "I am so glad that a boy like him has devoted himself to religion. He is a gem, and I am sure he will shine in any sphere of life." The Master glanced approvingly at Narendra and said, "They say it was the fiery appeal of Advaita Goswami that induced the Lord to incarnate as Sri Gauranga at Nadia. Similarly, all this that you see (meaning his own advent) is on account of him (Narendra)."

Two months passed, and the illness continued unabated. The medicine had no effect. This made the doctor anxious, and he began to lay added—sometimes exaggerated—stress on the regulation of the diet. He was now taking more than a professional interest in the case. His every word and action bespoke esteem for the Master, whose love, candour, and spirituality had captured his heart. The doctor's love now extended even to the devotees, who, he was convinced, were sincere in their devotion to their Guru. But the degree of reverence they paid to him seemed to the doctor altogether disproportionate. He was opposed to paying divine honours to any man, even if he were considered an Incarnation. One day he openly expressed to Sri Ramakrishna to this effect saying, "I can understand the significance of love and devotion to God. But to say that the Infinite descends on earth in the form of man creates all the trouble. It is difficult to realize how He could come as

the child of Yashoda, or Mary, or Sachi? It is this that has spoilt everything!" The Master was amused and said to his devotees, "Just listen to him! It is absurd. There are, of course, foolish bigots who disturb the peace of the world by giving undue prominence to their respective ideals. But that does not alter the truth of Divine Incarnation."

There was many a passage at arms on this point between the doctor and some of the devotees—Girish and Narendranath, for instance—and he had to admit that there was much to be said on the other side also. Thenceforth he expressed his views cautiously. But what these arguments failed to do, the Master's great love and sweetness, and the frequent manifestations of spiritual power to which the doctor was an eyewitness, accomplished in a short time. His vision was thus gradually enlarged. We shall give here an incident which left an indelible impress upon his mind.

It was the occasion of the Durga Puja. Surendranath Mitra, who was observing this festival at his own house, was sad because the Master's illness prevented his coming. In the evening of the second day of the festival, many people, including Narendranath and Dr. Sarkar, were assembled in Sri Ramakrishna's room. Narendranath was singing; every one was deeply affected. The Master went into trance repeatedly. The clock struck half past seven, and the most auspicious moment of the day—the Sandhi, as it is called—arrived. The doctor was about to take his leave, and Sri Ramakrishna stood up to bid him good-bye, when he suddenly fell into deep Samadhi. The devotees thought it to be due to the special sanctity of the hour. The doctor took his seat again to see what would happen next. About half an hour later, Sri Ramakrishna returned to normal consciousness and told his devotees what he had just experienced. He said, "I saw a luminous path open up between here and Surendra's house. Through Surendra's devotion the Mother was manifest in the image there. Her third eye was emitting a divine light. The usual series of lamps were burning before Her. Surendra was sitting in the courtyard, weeping bitterly. You had better go there. You will comfort him." Accordingly, Narendranath and the other devotees went to Surendra's house to find everything in accordance with the

¹ Referring respectively to Sri Krishna, Christ, and Sri Chaitanya.

are still free from it." Dr. Sarkar said excitedly, "Why, I know almost nothing. I don't feel any humiliation in learning from others, even from these young men, and I can even touch their feet." "I also tell them," said the Master, "as long as I live, I can learn from others." Then referring to the doctor he said to the devotees, "You see his humility. That shows the real worth of the man." The doctor then took his leave for the day.

Thus by degrees Dr. Mahendra Lal became more and more attached to Sri Ramakrishna. The Master was anxious to bring him to the realization of God. He caused some of his most brilliant disciples such as Mahendra, Girish, and Narendra, to associate with him. As a result of this the doctor saw the performance of Girish Chandra's *Life of Buddha* on the stage, and several other religious plays of his. Delighted with Narendra Nath's conversation, he invited him one day to dinner. Shortly after, at Shyampukur, at his request Narendra sang for him. The doctor was charmed, warmly embraced the boy and blessed him heartily. He said to Sri Ramakrishna, "I am so glad that a boy like him has devoted himself to religion. He is a gem, and I am sure he will shine in any sphere of life." The Master glanced approvingly at Narendra and said, "They say it was the fiery appeal of Advaita Goswami that induced the Lord to incarnate as Sri Gauranga at Nadia. Similarly, all this that you see (meaning his own advent) is on account of him (Narendra)."

Two months passed, and the illness continued unabated. The medicine had no effect. This made the doctor anxious, and he began to lay added—sometimes exaggerated—stress on the regulation of the diet. He was now taking more than a professional interest in the case. His every word and action bespoke esteem for the Master, whose love, candour, and spirituality had captured his heart. The doctor's love now extended even to the devotees, who, he was convinced, were sincere in their devotion to their Gurn. But the degree of reverence they paid to him seemed to the doctor altogether disproportionate. He was opposed to paying divine honours to any man, even if he were considered an Incarnation. One day he openly expressed to Sri Ramakrishna to this effect saying, "I can understand the significance of love and devotion to God. But to say that the Infinite descends on earth in the form of man creates all the trouble. It is difficult to realize how He could come as

the child of Yashoda, or Mary, or Sachi? It is this that has spoilt everything!" The Master was amused and said to his devotees, "Just listen to him! It is absurd. There are, of course, foolish bigots who disturb the peace of the world by giving undue prominence to their respective ideals. But that does not alter the truth of Divine Incarnation."

There was many a passage at arms on this point between the doctor and some of the devotees. Girish and Narendra Nath, for instance—and he had to admit that there was much to be said on the other side also. Thenceforth he expressed his views cautiously. But what these arguments failed to do, the Master's great love and sweetness, and the frequent manifestations of spiritual power to which the doctor was an eyewitness, accomplished in a short time. His vision was thus gradually enlarged. We shall give here an incident which left an indelible impress upon his mind.

It was the occasion of the Durga Puja. Surendra Nath Mitra, who was observing this festival at his own house, was sad because the Master's illness prevented his coming. In the evening of the second day of the festival, many people, including Narendra Nath and Dr. Sarkar, were assembled in Sri Ramakrishna's room. Narendra was singing; every one was deeply affected. The Master went into trance repeatedly. The clock struck half past seven, and the most auspicious moment of the day—the Sandhi, as it is called—arrived. The doctor was about to take his leave, and Sri Ramakrishna stood up to bid him good-bye, when he suddenly fell into deep Samadhi. The devotees thought it to be due to the special sanctity of the hour. The doctor took his seat again to see what would happen next. About half an hour later, Sri Ramakrishna returned to normal consciousness and told his devotees what he had just experienced. He said, "I saw a luminous path open up between here and Surendra's house. Through Surendra's devotion the Mother was manifest in the image there. Her third eye was emitting a divine light. The usual series of lamps were burning before Her. Surendra was sitting in the courtyard, weeping bitterly. You had better go there. You will comfort him." Accordingly, Narendra Nath and the other devotees went to Surendra's house to find everything in accordance with the

¹ Referring respectively to Sri Krishna, Christ, and Sri Chaitanya.

Master's vision.

During this Samadhi, Dr. Sarkar and another doctor who was present, examined the Master's heart with a stethoscope. No heart-beat could be determined. Nor was there any reaction when the Master's eyeball was touched with a finger. Both had to confess that science was powerless to explain it.

Three weeks passed, but there was no change in the Master's health. In spite of this weak condition the Master's cheerfulness continued unabated.

The Kali Puja day—a favourite day with the Master—was approaching. Devendra proposed to worship the Mother in the Master's presence. The devotees were opposed to this on the ground that the excitement would be sure to aggravate Sri Ramakrishna's illness. So Devendra abandoned the idea. But on the eve of the festival, the Master said to some of the devotees, "Prepare the requisites of worship on a small scale. Tomorrow we shall have Kali Puja." This was hailed with delight. In the absence of specific directions only the principal things were procured. The Master made no further reference to the matter. At seven o'clock in the evening the devotees, of their own accord, brought the things to his room and arranged them near his bed. Some of them on a former occasion had seen him worship with flowers, etc., and expected him to do the same thing now. The Master paid no attention to all these preparations. Lamps were lighted and incense burnt. Still the Master remained silent. The devotees sat near him, some awaiting his orders, others meditating on the Mother. Though there were thirty or more people in the room perfect silence reigned.

Among the devotees was Girish. He, like the rest, was at first surprised at the conduct of Sri Ramakrishna. But suddenly the idea struck him: "Sri Ramakrishna has no need to worship the Mother for his own sake. May he not worship Her out of pure love? But if that be so, why doesn't he do it? Can he be providing an opportunity for his devotees to worship the Divine Mother through Him? Undoubtedly!" He was beside himself with joy, and taking some flowers and sandal-paste offered them at Sri Ramakrishna's feet, shouting, "Glory to the Divine Mother!" A thrill passed through Sri Ramakrishna's body, and the next moment he was in deep Samadhi! Mahendra followed

Girish. Rakhal came next. And afterwards all the devotees worshipped the Master with scented flowers. The body of the Master had in the meantime undergone a strange transformation. His face became luminous, and a divine smile played on it. One of his hands was raised, and the other was held in the posture of one offering boons, as is seen in the images of Kali. The Mother of the universe was evidently manifesting through him, and the devotees were enraptured. The room was filled with joyous shouts. When the Master regained consciousness, the sweets and fruits gathered for worship were placed before him. He partook of some and blessed the devotees that they might attain the heights of devotion and knowledge. They ate the holy Prasad and spent the greater part of the night in songs to the Divine Mother. They had seen the Master that evening in an altogether new light and were filled with joy. They realized that he would be ever with them, protecting them from all dangers and tribulations. Nestled in his arms, they would be safe for ever.

Though the Master's illness was daily growing more serious, people were coming to him in greater numbers to satisfy their spiritual yearnings. It was here that many a householder devotee like Harish Chandra Mustafi, and boys like Manindra Nath Gupta first met the Master. Sri Ramakrishna set himself to guide these new-comers according to their particular temperaments. Disregarding his illness he gave them practical directions on spirituality. One day, after showing the correct posture for meditation on the personal aspect of God, he tried to show the one needed for His impersonal aspect also. But in doing so he became merged in Samadhi. After a while he forcibly dragged his mind to a lower plane and said, "I couldn't show you any more. As soon as I sit in that posture the mind is acted upon by the suggestion and becomes absorbed in Samadhi. There is a rush of blood also towards the throat, which is painful. The doctor has therefore, repeatedly warned me against Samadhi." The young man who was the recipient of this instruction was sorry and said, "Sir, I didn't want to see you do all this." "True", the Master replied, "but I can't help giving you a little practical training."

A great Christian devotee named Prabhudayal Misra, belonging to the Quaker sect, met the Master at Shyampukur

(October 31st, 1885). He was an inhabitant of Northern India, aged about thirty-five and lived the life of a monk. His two brothers had died at the same moment, on the very day that was set for the marriage of one of them. This so shocked Prabhudayal that he renounced the world then and there. He used to wear an ochre loin-cloth under his English dress.

The following is part of his conversation with the Master:

Prabhudayal: "It is the Lord who shines through every creature."

Sri Ramakrishna (slowly to Narendra Junior): "The Lord is one, but He is called by a thousand names."

Prabhudayal: "Jesus is not simply the son of Mary. He is God Himself."

(Addressing the devotees) "Now he (Sri Ramakrishna) is what you see him; again at another time He is God Himself. You do not recognize him fully. I had a vision of him long ago, and now I see him physically. I saw a garden, and he was there, sitting on an elevated seat. There was another seated on the floor, but he was not so advanced.

Sri Ramakrishna: "Do you have any visions?"

Prabhudayal: "Even while I was at home, I used to see a light. Afterwards I saw Jesus. I have no words to describe his beauty. Compared with it the beauty of a woman is nothing!"

Sri Ramakrishna went to the verandah, whence he shortly returned saying, "I saw him (Misra) standing in a heroic posture." Then he went again into ecstasy, shook hands with Prabhudayal smiling, and said, "Your desire will be fulfilled."

Prabhudayal (with folded palms): "From that day I surrendered everything to you—my body, mind, and soul."

Sri Ramakrishna smiled and asked the devotees to entertain Prabhudayal.¹

Meanwhile Dr. Sarkar had come. At the sight of him the Master fell into Samadhi. While returning to consciousness he said, "I am not senseless."

Doctor: "No, you are not!"

Then the Master sang a song about the intoxicating bliss of God, which moved the doctor greatly. Sri Ramakrishna again

¹ We hear of another Christian devotee, named Williams, who having his heart's desire fulfilled by Sri Ramakrishna, retired under his instruction to the Himalayas for religious practices.

rose to an exalted mood and put his legs on Dr. Sarkar's lap. When he returned to normal he drew his legs away. Then he said to the doctor, "Really that remark of yours the other day was wonderful ! Am I not resting on Her arms, and whom else shall I ask about my illness ! If I have to pray at all, I must pray to Her !"

As he said this, his eyes were filled with tears. He said to the doctor, "You are very pure. Otherwise I could not have touched you." Then quoting a song—"He is a Sadhu who tastes the bliss of God. What is in sense-pleasures ? Who cares for them"—he said, "I shall become normal when I hear that song—'Get drunk, my mind, with the bliss of God'." Narendra, who was in another room, was called in to sing it.

While at Shyampukur, Sri Ramakrishna one day had a vision of his subtle body emerging from the gross sheath and moving about the room. It had a number of sores on the back. He was puzzled by the sight, but it was made clear to him that the touch of profane people had caused them. They themselves had been purified, but their sins had been visited on him. The Master told his devotees more than once at Dakshineswar, that he would cheerfully be born a million times for the sake of mankind. When he described this vision to his devotees, they were deeply touched at his unbounded love and compassion and they resolved to keep watch so that no outsiders might touch him. Some of the devotees who remembered their past follies vowed not to touch the Master as long as he was ill. Narendra and some others observed that the Master's vision was in conformity with the doctrine of vicarious atonement advocated in certain religions like Christianity and Vaishnavism.

About this attempt to shut out the strangers from the Master's presence, Girish Chandra said, "You may try, but you won't succeed, for he has been born for this purpose." As a matter of fact it was found that though it was possible to exclude utter strangers, the attendants could not keep out newcomers who were known to the devotees. Therefore a rule was laid down not to admit anybody into the Master's presence without proper introduction, and these were strictly forbidden to touch his feet. But there were notable exceptions in cases where the devotion of the newcomer overcame all restrictions.

One day an amusing incident happened. An actress of the

theatre of which Girish was the manager, had once seen the Master during the representation of *Chaitanya Lila*. The Master had praised her skill and even allowed her to salute him by touching his feet. From that day she regarded him as a god and sought an opportunity to meet him again. Hearing of his illness she became impatient to see him and entreated Kalipada Ghosh to help her. Kalipada knew that this would not be allowed. So together they planned to hoodwink the attendants. One evening he brought her to the Shyampukur house in the guise of a young man in European dress, whom he introduced to the attendants of the Master as his friend. The rest was easy. When they came to Sri Ramakrishna they disclosed the whole plot to him; he enjoyed the fun and admired her cleverness. Pleased with her faith and devotion, he gave her some valuable advice on faith in God; then she took her departure after touching the Master's feet with her head. The disciples were much discomfited when they learned from the Master of the trick that had been played upon them. But in view of Sri Ramakrishna's enjoyment of the situation they had to forgo reproaching Kalipada.

While companionship with Sri Ramakrishna and wholehearted service to him gave the devotees increased faith and devotion, they were unconsciously walking on a very dangerous road. Many of them began to set more value upon a sentimental display than upon renunciation and self-restraint. They did not understand that emotional outbursts without these were powerless in their battle with the flesh. There was some excuse for this error. In the first place, the mind naturally seeks the line of least resistance trying to make a compromise between God and the world, between renunciation and enjoyment. The majority of people overlook the contradictory nature of the two and are satisfied with a partial progress in spirituality. Accordingly with every newcomer Sri Ramakrishna first of all took care to ascertain if he entertained this comfortable idea of religion. Where such proved to be the case, the highest ideal of renunciation would never be placed before the aspirant; only as much would be given as could be grasped. Hence instruction was individual, varying according to the grade of the aspirant. The advice to his young disciples destined for a life of Sannyasa was different from those given to his house-

holder devotees. It was for this reason that in *general* instructions we find him saying, "The path of devotion as chalked out by Narada, consisting of the chanting of the Lord's name and so forth, is the only way in this Kali Yuga." But very few caught the significance of these words, which was that these methods would bring about in the worldly man a gradual renunciation of lower desires.

Another cause of the devotees' error seems to be their lack of comprehension of the significance of Sri Ramakrishna's life. His marvellous austerities and self-abnegations had been performed long before their advent, and they failed to see the adamant foundations of his extraordinary manifestations of emotion. Matters came to a head when Girish Chandra Ghosh, who believed the Master to be an Incarnation of God, publicly announced his conviction. His was in every respect an exceptional case. But with the zeal of a convert he forgot that he was unique, and his invitation to everyone to accept his ideal and follow in his footsteps proved to be disastrous. With none of Girish's sincerity, there were some who went about declaring that they had given Sri Ramakrishna the "power of attorney" for themselves, and had, therefore, no need of spiritual discipline !

The views of Girish found a ready response in Ramchandra, who, as we have seen, was a Vaishnava and also believed that Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Krishna, and Sri Gauranga were identical. Not only did he now proclaim Sri Ramakrishna as the prophet of the age, but he also busied himself with tracing the identity of the Master's devotees with those of other Incarnations. And those who developed the greatest symptoms of sentimentality were in his estimation worthy of the highest place.

But the matter reached its climax when Vijay Krishna Goswami came from Dacca to see the Master and declared that while he was meditating there in his room, Sri Ramakrishna had appeared before him in flesh and blood, and that he had actually been able to feel him. The sentimentality of the devotees was at its highest. Some half a dozen of them would fall into partial trances accompanied by contortions of the body whenever there was any exciting cause such as devotional music. Many of them practically gave up the exercise of their common sense and reasoning faculty, and waited in suspense for

some miraculous manifestation of Sri Ramakrishna's divine power.

But among the Master's devotees there was one who was quick enough to foresee the baneful effect of such meaningless emotion. Narendra Nath saw the danger and set himself to stem the tide. He first addressed himself to the young men, who, he knew, would understand him best. He argued with them in this wise: "That effusion of sentiment which, while rousing a momentary feeling of devotion, fails to make a lasting impress on the mind—cannot strengthen a man to grapple with the temptations of the world—is neither deep nor of any permanent value in the domain of religion. It may produce physiological changes—making tears flow or hair stand on end; or it may partially deprive one of consciousness for the time being; but I am fully persuaded that it is the result of mere nervous excitation. If one cannot check it through the exercise of will-power, one should eat nutritious food and seek the help of a physician. Moreover, people feign a good deal. The higher and stronger the bounds of self-control, the deeper will be the feelings."

Few at first placed credence in Narendra Nath's words. But the truth percolated little by little. It was discovered that these effusions were in some cases feigned and the result of rehearsals at home. When a devotee was found going repeatedly into trances, Narendra Nath reasoned with him and advised him to practise self-control and to take nourishing food. Or, when Narendra was convinced that a man was merely simulating those states, he would ridicule him and thus try to correct his hysterical tendency. He also set before the young men positive ideals, and by means of songs and fiery discourses kindled in their hearts, the flame of devotion and renunciation. More frequently he would keep them spellbound with tales of the soul-stirring incidents of Sri Ramakrishna's Sadhana and interpreting his greatness in that light. Quoting from the *Imitation of Christ*, he would spur them on to emulate the glorious traits of the Master's character, for a servant, he said, who really loved his master must mould his life after him. This he held up before all as the true criterion of their love for Sri Ramakrishna. Again he would remind them of the Master's teaching, "Keep the knowledge of Advaita in your pocket, and then act

as you like in the world.” He explained to them that Sri Ramakrishna’s emotions were based on that knowledge, and it was that knowledge which they should endeavour to acquire.

While Narendra Nath was thus engaged in shaping the character of Sri Ramakrishna’s children, the condition of the Master was gradually going from bad to worse. When treatment proved ineffectual, Dr. Sarkar advised a change to some garden-house outside the city. A vigorous search was made, and the spacious garden-house of Gopal Chandra Ghosh at Cossipore was hired for eighty rupees a month. In the afternoon of the 11th of December, 1885, Sri Ramakrishna was moved to the new premises which he liked very much.

COSSIPORE GARDEN AND MAHASAMADHI

With the Cossipore garden we enter upon the last chapter of Sri Ramakrishna's eventful life. It was here that the curtain fell upon his varied activities on the physical plane. On the eve of his exit from the arena of the world, the Master showed himself at his highest, and making Narendra Nath the fit instrument for the propagation of his ideas, entrusted to him the charge of his flock. The Spirit which had put on a vesture of flesh for the fulfilment of a great purpose, at its completion cast off its temporary covering and returned to its pristine state of glory. The pathos and sublimity of this closing scene, therefore, can only be felt, not described.

The Cossipore garden is a beautiful one, about five acres in extent abounding in fruit trees and flowering plants, and is situated on the right side of the road that runs north from Calcutta to Baranagore. For a little over eight months the Master stayed here and patiently bore the sufferings of the disease till his tall and robust frame was reduced to a skeleton, and he finally succumbed. But his trained mind was not affected, and he looked after the individual as well as the collective welfare of his devotees as before. With redoubled energy he set himself to complete the work that he had commenced long ago at Dakshineswar. Here he gave the greatest manifestation of his powers, and the devotees saw the fulfilment of his prophecies regarding his own end: "I shall make the whole thing public before I go", "When people in large numbers will know and whisper about (the greatness of) this body, then the Mother will take it back", "Devotees will be sifted into inner and outer circles towards the end", and so on. His predictions as to the renunciation of Narendra Nath and other young disciples were verified later, as we shall see.

The main building was a two-storied one, with three rooms below and two above. The Master occupied the hall in the centre of the upper storey, a small room to its left being used by his attendants at night. To the right of the hall was an open terrace where the Master sometimes sat or walked. The hall just below his room and a smaller room to its right were

used by the devotees, while a small room to the extreme left was occupied by the Holy Mother. There were some out-houses, two tanks, of which one was fairly large, and some good walks. Needless to say, both the Master and the Holy mother breathed more freely in these new surroundings.

A few days passed in overcoming the preliminary difficulties of installation in the new place. Narendra realized that the attendants who volunteered to serve the Master must stay there—the place being too far to permit of their going home for meals—and that meant additional expense; besides, the number of attendants would have to be increased. The problem of finance might be left to the senior householder devotees; but it was he who must look to the nursing. He realized that he must spend the major portion of his time at Cossipore; for without him the other young devotees would not be able to carry on the work, in the teeth of opposition from their guardians, or to the neglect of their studies or office duties.

Narendra Nath was then preparing for the law examination. Though his studies and a law suit with his relatives demanded his constant presence in Calcutta, he decided to do his studying in the Cossipore garden during his leisure hours. He hoped to be able to provide his mother and brothers with a certain sum of money during the next few years, and then give up the world in quest of God. But destiny ordained otherwise.

Sri Ramakrishna was aware of the great difficulties which his devotees faced to ensure his treatment in Calcutta and Cossipore. It would seem that he knew the divine purpose in this phase of his life, and deeming it conducive to their welfare, he did not hesitate to accept their services. He was seen to alter their plans where they did not agree with his, sometimes openly, or without their knowledge when he feared to give offence. Just before coming to Calcutta for treatment, he said to Balaram one day, "That people should start a fund for my maintenance is not to my liking. I am not used to it. Here the case is really different. Rani Rasmani permanently settled a salary of seven rupees a month upon me as priest of the Kali temple, which I am to enjoy as long as I live here. Practically I am living on that pension. So, as long as I live outside Dakshineswar, you will please bear all my personal expenses." Again, when he heard that the Cossipore garden had been engaged at a higher

rent, he wondered how his poor devotees would meet it every month. He called Surendra to him and said, "Look here, Surendra, these devotees are mostly poor clerks and have large families to maintain. So how can they subscribe the high rent of the garden? Please bear the whole of it yourself." Surendra cheerfully agreed. Similarly, in view of his increasing weakness Sri Ramakrishna knew that it would soon be impossible for him to go outside to the toilet. Seeing his anxiety Latu with great earnestness said, "Sir, I shall be your sweeper." These words, uttered with his peculiar Behari accent, made the Master as well as the devotees laugh even in that dismal situation. Thus Sri Ramakrishna tried by suggestions to minimise the difficulties of his devotees.

Gradually everything became systematic. The young disciples of the Master began to stay with him now for the most of the day and night. Narendra was their leader. When they were not occupied in the service of the Master, he would bring them together and engage them in meditation, study, discussion, or songs. Thus busied, they were always in a delightful atmosphere, and time passed unnoticed. Attracted by the pure, unselfish love of Sri Ramakrishna on the one hand, and the personality and fraternal spirit of Narendra Nath on the other, these young men formed a brotherhood more closely knit together than any family. Though the number of these sacrificing youths did not exceed twelve,¹ yet every one of them, by the consecration of his life to the service of the Guru, appeared a tower of strength.

Shortly after his arrival at Cossipore Sri Ramakrishna took a short stroll in the garden. The devotees were glad, thinking that he would be strengthened by taking such walks regularly. But it had the opposite effect, his weakness was aggravated, and he could not go out for the next few days. The doctors recommended nourishing food; and in a few days the Master felt better and stronger. This improvement continued for some days, and Dr. Sarkar was delighted to see it.

¹ The names of these twelve devotees are Narendra, Rakhal, Baburam, Niranjana, Yogin, Latu, Tarak, Gopal Senior, Kali, Shashi, Sharat, and Gopal Junior. Sarada on account of the persecution of his father used to come now and then and stay for a day or two. Harish stayed only for a few days, after which his brain was deranged and he went home. Hari and Gangadhar came at intervals and practised Tapasya at home.

Two young attendants used to go to Calcutta every day to bring the necessary articles of food and to make a report to the doctors. The other boys divided among themselves the tasks of nursing, marketing, and other household duties. The Holy Mother had the charge of preparing the food as well as feeding the Master. When anything special had to be made, Gopal Senior or Latu gave her the doctor's instructions. Lakshmi Devi, Sri Ramakrishna's niece, was her companion and helper. Sometimes the women devotees of the Master would come for a day or two. The monetary affairs of the household were managed by the senior devotees, who also rendered personal service by turns whenever they had leisure. Till every arrangement was complete none of the young devotees went home, except for a few hours in cases of pressing necessity, and they gave their guardians to understand that until Sri Ramakrishna's recovery they would not be able to live their old life at home. Finding them so stubborn, the guardians thought it best to give in, rather than to lose them altogether. When at the united effort of the grown-up and the young devotees the treatment and the nursing of the Master were going smoothly, Narendra had a little breathing time and thought of going home for a day or two to look after his family affairs. One night he spoke about it to his brother-disciples and went to bed. But he could not sleep. He got up, and finding Gopal Junior, Sharat, and a few others awoke, he said to them, "Come, let us have a walk in the garden." In the course of the walk, Narendra said to his companions, "The Master's disease is very serious. Perhaps he intends to lay down the body. Strive your best for spiritual uplift through service unto him and prayer and meditation, while yet there is time. After his passing, there will be no end to your repentance. We are wasting time in the foolish thought that we shall pray to God after finishing this or that business at hand. We are fastening more chains of desires on us, and desires mean death. We must root them out at once."

It was a cold starry night, and perfect stillness reigned everywhere. Narendra's introspective mind caught the contagion of the hour and felt disposed to meditate. He sat under a tree, and seeing a stack of dry hay and twigs near by, he said, "Set fire to that. At this hour the monks light their Dhuni fire. Let us do the same and burn up our desires." The fire was

lighted. The young devotees, as they put the faggots into the fire, made a holocaust of their desires at the same time. The very thought filled their hearts with unexpected joy. They actually felt that their minds were being purged, and that they were coming closer to God. After two or three hours, they put out the fire and retired. Narendra went home according to previous arrangement and returned after a couple of days.

About this time, Pundit Shashadhar paid a visit to the Master in the Cossipore garden and said, "Sir, the scripture says that saints like you can cure their physical illness by means of will-power alone. If you only concentrate your mind on the affected part, with the resolve that it be cured, you will be cured. Why don't you try it, sir?" The Master replied, "You are a scholar, and still you make this thoughtless proposal! This mind has been given up to God once for all. How can I withdraw it from Him to turn it on this worthless body?" Such was his resignation to God, even in his agony!

Shashadhar was silenced. But Narendra and other devotees were not. After the departure of Shashadhar, they pressed Sri Ramakrishna to try it. "You must cure your illness," they persisted, "for our sake at least."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Do you think that I have been undergoing this suffering voluntarily? I do wish to recover. But how is that possible? It all depends upon the Mother."

Narendra: "Then please pray to Her for your recovery. She cannot but listen to you."

Sri Ramakrishna: "It is easy for you to say so, but such words I can never utter."

Narendra: "No, sir, that won't do. You must tell the Mother about it, at least for our sake."

Sri Ramakrishna: "All right, I shall try to do so if I can."

After a few hours Narendra Nath asked the Master if he had prayed, and if so, with what result.

Sri Ramakrishna: "I said to Her, 'I cannot eat anything for this pain. Please so arrange that I may eat a little.' She showed you all and said, 'Why, you are eating through so many mouths!' I was ashamed and could not utter another word."

What a total indifference to the body! What a firm grasp of the knowledge of Oneness!

Now another physician undertook the treatment of the

Master. Dr. Rajendra Lal Datta, a distinguished homoeopath of Calcutta, had heard of the illness, and of his own accord proposed to try another remedy with the approval of his friend, Dr. Sarkar. The results were good temporarily, and the devotees were encouraged.

On the morning of December 23rd 1885, the Master was in a particularly happy mood. He said Niranjana, "You are my father, I shall sit on your lap." Touching Kalipada's chest he said, "Be illumined." Two women devotees also received his blessings that morning. He touched them on the chest with his foot while he was in Samadhi. One of them wept as she said, "Oh you are so kind!" The Master summoned Gopal Senior also, to bless him. In the evening he said to Mahendra, "My task of teaching is almost finished—I can no longer instruct people. The whole world I see to be nothing but the Lord. I sometimes think, whom shall I teach?" In the course of the talk he asked Niranjana—who had just returned from home—how he felt towards him. Niranjana replied, "Sir, formerly I loved you, but now it is impossible to live away from you." Mahendra said, "Sir, the other day I realized what difficulties these boys surmounted to come here and take charge of you." The words stirred the Master's feelings deeply and he fell into a trance. Regaining consciousness he said, "I saw that everything was passing from the embodied to the disembodied state! I wish to reveal more, but I can't. Well, isn't that trend towards the Impersonal an indication of the coming dissolution of the body?"

Mahendra: "Perhaps so."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Even now I see the Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute, without names or forms, exists—like this! (He showed by a gesture). With great difficulty I curbed my feelings.

"This disease marks out the inner circle of devotees from the outer. Those who have renounced the world and are living here belong to the former class, while those who pay occasional visits and only ask about my health are of the latter class."

We now come to an event of great importance, showing the Master's wonderful love for his devotees and his extraordinary spiritual power. It was the 1st of January, 1886. Sri Ramakrishna felt much better and wished to take a walk in

lighted. The young devotees, as they put the faggots into the fire, made a holocaust of their desires at the same time. The very thought filled their hearts with unexpected joy. They actually felt that their minds were being purged, and that they were coming closer to God. After two or three hours, they put out the fire and retired. Narendra went home according to previous arrangement and returned after a couple of days.

About this time, Pundit Shashadhar paid a visit to the Master in the Cossipore garden and said, "Sir, the scripture says that saints like you can cure their physical illness by means of will-power alone. If you only concentrate your mind on the affected part, with the resolve that it be cured, you will be cured. Why don't you try it, sir?" The Master replied, "You are a scholar, and still you make this thoughtless proposal! This mind has been given up to God once for all. How can I withdraw it from Him to turn it on this worthless body?" Such was his resignation to God, even in his agony!

Shashadhar was silenced. But Narendra and other devotees were not. After the departure of Shashadhar, they pressed Sri Ramakrishna to try it. "You must cure your illness," they persisted, "for our sake at least."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Do you think that I have been undergoing this suffering voluntarily? I do wish to recover. But how is that possible? It all depends upon the Mother."

Narendra: "Then please pray to Her for your recovery. She cannot but listen to you."

Sri Ramakrishna: "It is easy for you to say so, but such words I can never utter."

Narendra: "No, sir, that won't do. You must tell the Mother about it, at least for our sake."

Sri Ramakrishna: "All right, I shall try to do so if I can."

After a few hours Narendra Nath asked the Master if he had prayed, and if so, with what result.

Sri Ramakrishna: "I said to Her, 'I cannot eat anything for this pain. Please so arrange that I may eat a little.' She showed you all and said, 'Why, you are eating through so many mouths!' I was ashamed and could not utter another word."

What a total indifference to the body! What a firm grasp of the knowledge of Oneness!

Now another physician undertook the treatment of the

Master. Dr. Rajendra Lal Datta, a distinguished homoeopath of Calcutta, had heard of the illness, and of his own accord proposed to try another remedy with the approval of his friend, Dr. Sarkar. The results were good temporarily, and the devotees were encouraged.

On the morning of December 23rd 1885, the Master was in a particularly happy mood. He said Niranjana, "You are my father, I shall sit on your lap." Touching Kalipada's chest he said, "Be illumined." Two women devotees also received his blessings that morning. He touched them on the chest with his foot while he was in Samadhi. One of them wept as she said, "Oh you are so kind!" The Master summoned Gopal Senior also, to bless him. In the evening he said to Mahendra, "My task of teaching is almost finished—I can no longer instruct people. The whole world I see to be nothing but the Lord. I sometimes think, whom shall I teach?" In the course of the talk he asked Niranjana—who had just returned from home—how he felt towards him. Niranjana replied, "Sir, formerly I loved you, but now it is impossible to live away from you." Mahendra said, "Sir, the other day I realized what difficulties these boys surmounted to come here and take charge of you." The words stirred the Master's feelings deeply and he fell into a trance. Regaining consciousness he said, "I saw that everything was passing from the embodied to the disembodied state! I wish to reveal more, but I can't. Well, isn't that trend towards the Impersonal an indication of the coming dissolution of the body?"

Mahendra: "Perhaps so."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Even now I see the Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute, without names or forms, exists—like this! (He showed by a gesture). With great difficulty I curbed my feelings.

"This disease marks out the inner circle of devotees from the outer. Those who have renounced the world and are living here belong to the former class, while those who pay occasional visits and only ask about my health are of the latter class."

We now come to an event of great importance, showing the Master's wonderful love for his devotees and his extraordinary spiritual power. It was the 1st of January, 1886. Sri Ramakrishna felt much better and wished to take a walk in

the garden. It was about three in the afternoon. As it was a holiday, about thirty lay disciples were present, some in the hall and others under the trees. When Sri Ramakrishna came down, those in the hall saluted him and followed him at a distance as he walked slowly towards the gate. Girish, Ram, Atul, and some others, who were chatting under a tree, came and saluted the Master. Sri Ramakrishna suddenly said to Girish, "Well Girish, what have you found in me that you proclaim me before all as an Incarnation?" Girish, not at all taken aback by the question, knelt before him with folded hands and said in a voice shaken with emotion, "What can an insignificant creature like me say about One whose glory even sages like Vyasa and Valmiki could not measure?" Hearing these words, spoken with the greatest intensity, Sri Ramakrishna was deeply moved and said, "What more shall I say? I bless you all! Be illumined!" Saying this he fell into a state of semi-consciousness. The devotees heard these solemn words and became mad with joy. They forgot their resolutions to avoid touching him. Overwhelmed with emotion they moved forward to take the dust of his feet. One by one they saluted him. At this manifestation of devotion, Sri Ramakrishna's mercy overstepped its bounds, and he touched them all, one by one, with appropriate blessings. This powerful touch revolutionized their minds. Some laughed, others wept, some sat down to meditate, while a few shouted to others who were elsewhere to come and be blessed. Narendra and a few other young devotees, who had passed the greater part of the preceding night in attendance on the Master and in devotional exercises, were asleep. Latu and Sharat, who took this opportunity to sweep the Master's room and sun his bedding, witnessed the scene from the roof. They preferred to finish their work and kept to their posts.

Gradually the Master regained his normal state and returned to his room. The devotees upon calming down realized that the Master was showering his grace upon all without distinction.

Questioned about their experiences on this occasion, some said that they had felt a sort of pleasing intoxication, others that they had clearer visions of their Chosen Ideals than before, still others that they had seen an effulgence or felt the rush of a strange current, while all confessed to having had an inex-

pressible bliss. Every one was convinced that it was due to the Master's grace. Only two persons did not receive the Master's blessings.¹ In this connection special mention may be made of a devotee named Haran Chandra Das who received unusual favour. As he prostrated himself before Sri Ramakrishna, the latter in that state of trance placed his foot on his head.

The following is the account of Ramlal, the nephew of the Master: "Formerly I could see in meditation only portions of my Chosen Ideal's form. But that day, His entire form flashed before my vision, and I saw Him seated in my heart as a distinct living presence." Vaikuntha said, "After two or three devotees had been blessed, I, too, stepped forward and saluting him asked his blessing. He said, 'You have already everything.' 'Then please make me feel it,' I said. He said, 'All right', and lightly touched my chest. That worked a strange transformation within me. I saw the blissful form of the Master in everything I saw. I was beside myself with joy and shouted to all to come and share in the blessing. That vision haunted me for days, and my work suffered in consequence. Unable to bear the tension, I had to pray to Sri Ramakrishna to lessen its intensity, after which it became intermittent."

It is said that after the incident Sri Ramakrishna experienced a burning sensation all over the body—due, as was alleged, to taking on the sins of the persons touched—and asked for some Ganga water to be sprinkled over him, which relieved the suffering.

Narendra at this time was burning with a tremendous hankering for realization. We reproduce some of his experiences as recounted by him to M. at Cossipore.

Narendra: "Last Saturday (2nd January, 1886) I was meditating here. Suddenly I felt a strange sensation within my chest."

Mahendra: "The awakening of the Kundalini."

Narendra: "Probably so. I felt clearly the nerves Ida and Pingala, and asked Hazra to feel my chest. Yesterday I saw Ramakrishna upstairs and said, 'Everyone has been blessed with realization. Let me, too, have something. When all of them have got it, shall I alone be left without it?' He said, 'Just make some arrangement for your family, and you shall get all. What do

¹They, too, were blessed afterwards.

you want ?' I said, 'I wish to remain immersed in Samadhi for three or four days at a stretch, breaking it only for food.' He said, 'You are a fool. There is a higher state than that even. Don't you sing—Whatever is, is Thyself? Come here after making some provision for your family, and you shall get a higher state than even Samadhi.'

"This morning I went home. They began to take me to task for neglecting my studies when I should be preparing for my examination. I went to my study at my grandmother's house, to read. But as I was about to begin, I was seized with a sort of dread, as if it were a most horrible thing to study! There was such a struggle in my heart! I never wept like that in my life!

"Leaving my books and all, I came here. My shoes slipped off somewhere on the road. Dashing past a rick of straw, some of it stuck to me! I ran and till I reached here."

It was nine o'clock in the evening of January 4th. Niranjan, Shashi and M. sat near the Master, who was just awake after a short sleep. The disease had taken a turn for the worse and the pain was very great. But still he talked in whispers, or by signs, about Narendra. He said "Look at the wonderful state of Narendra! There was a time when he did not believe in the personal aspect of God. Now see how he is panting for realization!" Then he hinted that Narendra was soon to reach the goal.

That very night Narendra left for Dakshineswar with one or two brother-disciples, to meditate. Under the Master's directions he had been practising different forms of spiritual discipline, with remarkable success. Sri Ramakrishna was preparing his chief disciple for the great task which was to be his later. One day the Master expressly commissioned him to look after the young devotees, saying, "I leave them in your care. See that they practise spiritual exercises and do not return home." He was silently training them for the monastic life, and we find him one day asking Naren and the other young men if they would beg their food in the streets. They all hailed the proposal with delight and went out with begging-bowls. They cooked the various raw foods which they had received, and offered some to the Master, who partook of a grain or two of rice and said, "Well done. This food is very pure." He was

overjoyed to think that it would not be long before these young men, clad in the ochre robe of the Sannyasin, would go begging their food from door to door and conferring upon humanity the highest blessings of religion. He was satisfied.

On the Shivaratri day the young group passed the night in chanting and meditation. Narendra, whose austerities were opening up to him new sources of spiritual power, had a fancy to test that power. He asked Kali to touch him and became absorbed in meditation for some minutes. What he did in these few minutes is not known, but it had the effect of throwing Kali into a very deep meditation. Sri Ramakrishna somehow learned of it and took Narendra to task for frittering away his powers before they were accumulated as well as for his imposing his ideas on another.

Sri Ramakrishna was sinking daily; his body was worn to a skeleton, and his diet was reduced to a minimum. All this grieved the devotees. They knew now that they were going to lose the great mainstay of their life. The haemorrhage terrified them. But the Master looked as cheerful as ever. When the pain was excruciating, he would only whisper with a smile, "Let the body and its pain take care of each other, thou, my mind, be always in bliss!" He became even more solicitous for the welfare of his devotees. One night (March 14), when he was wide awake, he whispered to Mahendra, "I am bearing all this cheerfully because otherwise you would be weeping. If you all will say that it is better that the body should go rather than suffer this torture, I am willing." Towards morning Girish arrived with Dr. Upendra and Kaviraj Navagopal. The Master was slightly better. To the devotees who sat by he said, "The disease is of the body. Quite naturally. I see that it is made of material particles." Turning to Girish he said, "I see many forms of the Lord, and this (his own form), too, is one of them!"

The next morning he felt better. It was about 8 o'clock. Narendra, Rakhal, Latu, Mahendra, Gopal Senior, and others sat there in gloom. Sri Ramakrishna said, "Do you know what I see? God has become everything! Men and animals appear to be but frameworks coated with skin, and it is He who is moving the head and limbs! As I once saw in a vision—garden, houses, road, men, and cattle, everything made of wax—composed of the same substance!"

"I see He Himself is the executioner, the victim and the sacrificial post !"

As he said this, he lost his outer senses. Regaining partial consciousness, he said, "Now I have no pain—I am perfectly at ease !"

Looking at Latu he said, "There sits Latu, leaning his head upon his hand. To me it is as if the Lord were sitting in that posture !"

As he looked at his devotees, he seemed to be melting in love. He passed his hand over the faces of Rakhal and Narendra as a mother caresses her child. A short while after he said to Mahendra, "Had this body (meaning himself) been allowed to last a little longer, many more people would have been spiritually awakened." He paused for a moment and resumed, "But Mother has ordained otherwise. Lest people should take advantage of my simplicity and illiteracy, and prevail upon me to bestow the rare gifts of spirituality, She will take me away. And this is an age when devotional exercises are at a sad discount."

Rakhal (tenderly): "Please ask Her to make your body last."

Sri Ramakrishna: "That depends upon Her will."

Narendra: "Your will is at one with Hers."

Sri Ramakrishna (after a little pause): "It won't do any good. How can I ask Her for anything when my will is entirely merged in Hers ?"

The devotees sat silent. Sri Ramakrishna gazed at them tenderly, placed his hand on his chest, and said, "Here (i.e., within him) are two personalities. One is She, and the other is Her devotee. It is the latter who broke his arm, and, it is he again who is ill. Do you understand ?"

The disciples were silent. The Master added, "Alas ! To whom shall I tell all this, and who will understand me ?" Then after a pause he said, "He comes with His devotees as a man—as an Incarnation. The devotees again return with Him."

Rakhal: "You must not leave us behind."

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling): "A band of minstrels appears before a house. They sing and dance, and go away as suddenly as they come—nobody knows them !"

The Master and devotees smiled. After a short pause he began: "Pain is unavoidable so long as there is form. That the Lord takes on a form is for the sake of His devotees."

Looking affectionately at Narendra, the Master gave him some instructions about the state of a man after realization.

Narendra: "Some get cross with me when I advocate the need of renunciation."

Sri Ramakrishna (in a whisper): "One *must* renounce. (Pointing to his limbs) Suppose one thing is placed under another. If you want to take the former, won't you have to remove the latter? Can you get at that without removing this?"

Narendra: "Quite so."

Sri Ramakrishna: "When you see everything saturated with That, can you see anything else?"

Narendra: "Is renunciation of the world imperative?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "As I said, if you see everything as saturated with That, can you see anything else—family or the like?"

Sri Ramakrishna praised Narendra's spirit of renunciation. Rakhal said, "Narendra now appreciates you thoroughly." To which the Master replied, "Yes, and many others are doing the same."

At the Master's request Narendra sang some devotional songs which drew tears from the eyes of the Master and Rakhal.

When everything failed to bring about the recovery of the Master, the Holy Mother wanted to try spiritual methods. She went to Tarakeswar to obtain the grace of the Lord Shiva for her husband's cure. She lay prostrate before the temple praying—resolved not to touch food till her prayer was answered. On the second night she was startled by a crashing noise. A great spirit of renunciation overcame her, and she thought, "What are earthly relationships! Are they not mere dreams?" She arose and returned to Cossipore. As soon as the Master saw her he asked, "Well, what is the result of your mission?" The Holy Mother told him what had happened. He seemed to have expected it.

The zeal of the young devotees, particularly of Narendra Nath, for realization was increasing. One day his brother-disciples missed him and two others. Subsequently it was found

that spurred on by the immortal example of Lord Buddha, he with Tarak and Kali had gone to Bodh-Gaya, dressed in ochre cloth, to practise austerities. It was feared that he might not return. His absence was much felt by the other disciples at Cossipore. When others wanted to do the same, the matter was reported to Sri Ramakrishna. He assured all that Narendra, convinced of the futility of searching here and there for religion, would soon come back. As a matter of fact, the party did return after a few days, having enjoyed their stay very much at the place of Buddha's Nirvana.

Kali, too, was struggling for a realization of the highest truth. No lower phase interested him. A wave of doubt swept over his mind. When he consulted the Master about it, he was asked, "Do you believe in God?" Kali said, "No". "Do you believe in religion?" "No," replied the boy frankly, "I don't believe in the Vedas or any scriptures. I don't believe in anything spiritual." The Master took these words calmly and said, "Had you spoken like this to an ordinary Guru, he would have struck you. Look at Naren. He also passed through the same state of doubt, but he now believes in everything. He sheds tears in the name of Radha and Krishna. Your doubts, too, will be dispelled shortly, and you will believe in everything."

Great as was the devotion of every one of the attendants to Sri Ramakrishna, that of Shashi was by far the most conspicuous. It was unparalleled. Shashi was the very embodiment of service. He was convinced that the service to the Guru was the highest form of religion. He practised no other spiritual discipline. He knew no other asceticism. Regardless of personal comfort, of food, or rest, he was ever at work. His one idea was to alleviate the suffering of the Master. He would have given up his life, if he thought that would cure him. He had attained perfection through service, so of what use were other forms of discipline to him? Everyone marvelled at his indefatigable energy, his sustained power of endurance, and his boundless love for the Master.

One day Gopal Senior expressed his desire to the Master to distribute ochre cloths and Rudraksha rosaries among Sannyasins. Pointing to his young disciples, Sri Ramakrishna answered, "You won't find better monks than these anywhere. Give your cloths and rosaries to them." Gopal placed a bundle

of ochre cloths before the Master, who distributed them among his young disciples. One cloth was left, and the Master ordered it to be preserved for Girish, who was second to none in his spirit of renunciation. One evening the Master made the young boys go through a ceremony and permitted them to receive food from the houses of all irrespective of caste. Thus it was that the disciples were initiated into the monastic order by the Master himself, and the foundation of the future Ramakrishna Order was laid.

We have seen Narendra Nath's aspirations for the highest truth, and his struggles to attain it. Yet, one evening, as he was meditating, it came to him quite unexpectedly. At first he felt as if a light had been placed behind his head. Then he passed beyond all relativity and was lost in the Absolute. He had attained the Nirvikalpa Samadhi ! When he regained a little consciousness of the world, he found only his head, but not his body. He cried out, "Ah, where is my body ?" Hearing his voice Gopal Senior came into the room. Naren repeated the query. "Here it is, Naren," answered Gopal. When that failed to convince Narendra, Gopal was terrified and hastened to inform the Master. The latter only said, "Let him stay in that state for a while ! He has teased me long enough for it !"

After a long time, Narendra came to the consciousness of the physical world and found his brother-disciples clustered about him. An ineffable peace bathed his soul. When he came to the Master, the latter said, "Now the Mother has shown you all. But this realization of yours shall be locked up for the present, and the key will remain with me. When you will have finished doing Mother's work, this treasure will again be yours." He advised him to be careful about his health for some days and to discriminate in the choice of food.

It was the 16th April. The Master was a little better. Girish came to see him. The Master inquired about his health and asked Latu to bring tobacco, betel, and some refreshments for him. A devotee presented the Master with some garlands of flowers, which he put on one by one. Two of these he presented to Girish. He inquired several times if the refreshments had come. When they were brought before him, he barely tasted them and with his own hands gave the rest to Girish. Girish ate them in his presence. It was summer. The Master said,

"There is good water here." He was too weak to stand but he wanted to pour water for Girish. He moved, poured some water into a glass, and took a little on his palm to feel if it was cool. It was not cool enough, but knowing that none cooler was available, he gave it to Girish.

From his bed he began to talk almost in a whisper with Girish, Mahendra, and others on various spiritual topics—Girish's faith coming out in bold colours during the conversation. When Girish went to wash his hands, the Master sent word to him that he should not eat anything more that evening. Such incidents bring out Sri Ramakrishna's great care for his devotees.

It was the 22nd of April. Hirananda Saukiram, a young Sindhi graduate and editor of two papers, came from Hyderabad (Sind) to see Master. An admirer of Keshab Chandra Sen, Hirananda was familiar with Sri Ramakrishna and visited him often during his College days in Calcutta. The Master, who loved him for his purity of heart, was glad to see him.

Sri Ramakrishna asked Mahendra if he knew him. On his answering in the affirmative, the Master wished, to hear them talk together. As Mahendra kept silent, the Master called for Narendra and asked him to talk to Hirananda. After much hesitation, Hirananda said, "Well, why does the devotee suffer?"

Narendra: "The scheme of the world is devilish. I could have created a better world."

Hirananda: "Can there be pleasure without pain?"

Narendra: "I am offering no scheme of the universe, but simply my opinion of the present scheme. But there is one way out. Our only refuge is in pantheism: I am doing everything."

Hirananda: "That's easier said than done."

Narendra began to chant Shankara's Six Stanzas on Nirvana.

Hirananda: "Very good."

Sri Ramakrishna motioned to him to reply.

Hirananda: "To look at a room from one corner is just the same as to look at it from the centre. The dualistic position of 'Lord, I am Thy servant' leads to realization as much as the monistic one of 'I am He'. One can enter a room by one door as well as by any other."

All were silent. Hirananda requested Narendra to sing some-

thing. Narendra sang Shankara's Five Stanzas on the Loin-cloth, which Sri Ramakrishna much appreciated. The Master then asked him to sing, "Whatever is, is Thyself." Commenting on one line, Hirananda said to Narendra, "Now it is 'Thou art all'. Not 'I' but 'Thou'."

Narendra: "Give me one, and I shall give you a million. You are I, and I am you. There is nothing else except me."

Narendra began to recite some stanzas from the *Ashtavakra Samhita*, a treatise on Advaita Vedanta.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Hirananda, pointing to Narendra): "He moves about carrying a naked sword, as it were. (To Mahendra, pointing to Hirananda) How docile! As a hooded cobra is before a charmer!"

The Master was in an introspective mood. His face was beaming, as if untouched by his terrible pain. Some devotees had brought flowers and garlands for him. He took some flowers and with them touched his head, his throat, his heart, and so on. Then he began to talk to Narendra.

Sri Ramakrishna: "The nerve-current begun its upward course, I don't know how long ago. The childlike mood is upon me, and I play like this with flowers. Do you know what I am seeing? The body appears like a bamboo framework covered with cloth, and it is moving. It moves because there is someone inside.

"Like a pumpkin with its pulp and seeds scooped out; there is no attachment—passions or the like—within. The interior is perfectly clean, and—"

It was so painful for him to talk, that Mahendra added, "And you are seeing the Lord within."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Both within and without. It is the Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute. I see that Sachchidananda has taken on this form and is permeating everything, both inside and outside.

(To Mahendra and Hirananda, after a pause) "I look upon you all as relatives. Not one of you seems to be a stranger. I see the Lord alone moving through different forms. I also find that when the mind is joined to Him, the pain is not felt. Now I see that the Absolute is covered, as it were, with a skin, and this ulcer of the throat lies on one side of it."

After another pause he said, "Spirit and matter sometimes

borrow from each other. When the body is ill, the spirit thinks it is ill."

Hirananda wanted this point explained. Mahendra said, "When boiling water scalds the hand, we say the water has scalded the hand. Really it is the heat, and not the water."

Hirananda (to the Master): "Please give your opinion on the point—why a devotee suffers."

Sri Ramakrishna: "The body only suffers. Do you follow me?"

Then the Master hinted that in his case it was due to the sins of other people whom in exalted moods he had touched and redeemed—a clear case of vicarious atonement.

May, June, and July passed, and Sri Ramakrishna's condition went from bad to worse. The devotees realized that the day of his final release from the torments of the body was at hand. They were heart-broken, but resigned themselves to the inevitable decree of Providence.

In spite of failing forces, the Master continued his spiritual work. One day he initiated Narendra with the name of Rama, which, he said, was his own Ishta-Mantra. It produced a miraculous effect. Narendra was filled with bliss and in the intoxication of it went round and round the house, uttering the name of Rama. He was in such an exalted mood that none dared approach him. After this had gone on for hours, the other disciples grew alarmed and reported it to Sri Ramakrishna, who simply said, "Let him be. He will recover in due course." But it was 4 o'clock before Narendra regained normal consciousness.

During the Master's stay at Cossipore, Nag Mahashay saw him a few times. His visits were not frequent, for he could not bear to see the unspeakable sufferings of the Master. One day Sri Ramakrishna saw him entering the room and said, "Come near. Sit close to me." He warmly embraced Nag Mahashay for some minutes. Another day finding him at his bedside, the Master said, "Look here, Durgacharan. The doctors have failed. Can you do anything to cure me?" Nag Mahashay reflected for a minute and then resolved to transfer the Master's disease into his own body. He said in an animated voice, "Yes, sir, I know how to cure you. By your grace I will do it at once." And he approached the Master. Sri Ramakrishna divined his purpose and pushed him back saying, "Yes, I know you can do that."

Another day—very near the end of the Master's mortal term—Nag Mahashay was entering his room, when he overheard Sri Ramakrishna asking for an Amalaka fruit and a devotee replying that it could not be had, because it was out of season. Without a word Nag Mahashay left to search all the gardens about Calcutta for the fruit. For two days nobody saw him. On the third day he appeared before Sri Ramakrishna with two or three Amalakas in his hand. The Master was exceedingly glad to see him. He asked the Holy Mother to cook rice and some hot curry for Durgacharan, who came from Eastern Bengal and relished highly spiced food. When it was ready, he took a little of it first, because, as he said, Durgacharan would not take it unless it was converted into Prasad. Even in the midst of great suffering the Master thought of everything.

About eight or nine days before his passing, Sri Ramakrishna asked Yogin to read to him from the Bengali almanac the dates from the twenty-fifth Shravana (9th August) onwards. Yogin read until he came to the last day of the month. The Master then made a sign that he did not want to hear any more.

Four or five days after this, the Master called Narendra Nath to his side. There was nobody else in the room. He made Narendra sit before him and gazing at him fell into Samadhi. Narendra Nath felt a subtle force like an electric shock penetrating his body. Gradually he, too, lost outward consciousness. He did not remember how long he sat there. When he came to normal consciousness, he found Sri Ramakrishna weeping. On being asked why he wept, the Master said, "Today I have given you my all and have become a Fakir ! Through this power you will do immense good to the world, and then only shall you go back." It was in this way that Sri Ramakrishna passed on his powers to Narendra ; henceforth Ramakrishna and Narendra Nath became as one soul. What the effect of this holy confluence was is a commonplace of history now, and we need not tell of it here. Suffice it to say that Vedanta as revived in the life of the Master found in the person of the worthy disciple an effective instrument to bring about world-wide regeneration.

A couple of days later, the idea entered Narendra's mind of testing Sri Ramakrishna's statement that he was an incarnation. He said to himself, "If in the midst of this dreadful physical pain he can declare his Godhead, then I shall believe

him." Strange to say, the moment this thought came to him, Sri Ramakrishna summoning all his energy said distinctly, "He who was Rama and Krishna, is now Ramakrishna in this body—but not in your Vedantic sense!" Narendra was stricken with shame and remorse for having doubted the Master even after so many revelations.

At last the eventful day arrived, a day of intense grief for the devotees. It was Sunday, August 15th, the last day of Shravana. The Master's suffering was at its highest. He became restless. The pulse was irregular. Atul, whose skill in feeling the pulse the Master often praised, was the first to realize the gravity of the situation. He declared the case to be hopeless and asked the attendants to be on the alert. A little before dusk, the Master felt difficulty in breathing. The devotees wept in grief. The light that illumined their hearts was, humanly speaking, about to be extinguished. They stood by the bedside of the Master. In the evening he complained of hunger. The attendants tried to give him a little liquid food, but he could swallow very little of it. They washed his mouth and carefully laid him on the bed, stretching his legs and supporting them with pillows. Two attendants were fanning him. Suddenly the Master fell into Samadhi. The body became stiff. There was something about this Samadhi which struck Shashi as unusual, and he began to weep. Girish and Ram were sent for. After midnight Sri Ramakrishna regained consciousness and said that he was exceedingly hungry. He was helped to sit up and took a full cup of porridge without discomfort. It was many days since he had so little difficulty in eating. He said he was quite refreshed. Narendra suggested that he should go to sleep. At this the Master in a clear voice—another unusual thing—uttered thrice the name of Kali and gently lay down. Seeing the Master was comfortable, Narendra went downstairs to rest.

Suddenly, at two minutes past one, a thrill passed through the Master's body, making the hair stand on end. The eyes became fixed on the tip of the nose. The face was lit up with a smile. The Master entered into Samadhi. It was Mahasamadhi, for never more did he return to the mortal plane. Thus in the early hours of Monday, the 16th of August, 1886, Sri Ramakrishna departed from the world, leaving a host of stricken devotees and admirers. The greatest man the nineteenth

century had produced went back to the eternal state from which he had come. Though it was a brilliant moonlit night, the hearts of the devotees were in dark shadow. A few minutes before, who were richer than they? But now they were the poorest beings on earth. The more they looked at the serene face of the Master, the more desolate and helpless they felt. Who would solve their doubts and difficulties? Who would stand by them in their sorrows and sufferings? Their sense of loss was overwhelming.

Girish and Ram came shortly after. The dismal news quickly spread all over Calcutta, and people thronged in the morning from all directions to have a last look at the Master's divine form. Colonel Vishwanath Upadhyaya arrived at about eight. He found the body stiff, but there was still some trace of heat. He began to rub the spine and after some time declared that all was not yet over, that it was a state of deep Samadhi. He advised the devotees to wait before doing the last honours to the body. At about noon Dr. Mahendra Lal Sarkar came and after examining the body said that life had passed out only half an hour before. His opinion was accepted as final, and arrangements were made for the funeral.

At five o'clock the sacred body was brought down and laid on a cot. It was dressed in ochre cloth and decorated with sandal-paste and flowers. At the instance of Dr. Sarkar a photograph of it was taken, with the devotees standing around.¹ An hour later, the body was carried to the burning ghat at Cossipore, to the accompaniment of devotional music. Spectators wept as they saw the procession pass. The body was placed on the funeral pyre. Trailokya Nath Sanyal sang some suitable songs, and within a couple of hours everything was finished.

A calm resignation came to the devotees as they prepared to leave the cremation ground, for they all realized the Master's eternal presence within. He, their Lord, was the same in the disembodied state as in the physical life. In his own words, he had passed from one chamber to another, that was all. They put the sacred relics of the Master's body into an urn and returned to the Cossipore garden—the nest alas, of a thousand painfully sweet memories—shouting, “Victory to Bhagavan Ramakrishna !”

¹It is now learnt that more than one photograph was taken on the occasion—Publisher.

AFTER THE PASSING

The most important matter that came up before the devotees at the Cossipore garden was how to preserve in a fitting manner the sacred relics of Sri Ramakrishna. The majority were in favour of purchasing a plot of land on the Ganga and interring the relics there. For want of funds, that project had to be abandoned. The householder devotees decided to preserve the ashes in a garden owned by Ramchandra Datta at Kankurgachhi, near Calcutta, where the Master had once been. The young disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, however, did not approve of the idea. They took the major portion of the bones and ashes and sent it to the house of Balaram Bose for regular worship, cherishing the ambition of burying it at the earliest opportunity somewhere on the bank of the Ganga. The rest of the ashes was taken over to Kankurgachhi and interred there on the Janmashtami day, in which ceremony the young disciples of the Master assisted, Shashi carrying the sacred vessel on his head. Ram instituted a regular service there also.

There were still a few days left before the expiration of the lease of the Cossipore garden. Of the young disciples of the Master, some had lived there, and others came daily from their homes. The former had already renounced the world, and it was evident that some of the latter were preparing to do the same. What were all these young men to do? The householders who had been defraying the expenses of the Master withdrew their aid, and some of them advised the youths to return home and lead the life of pious citizens. But close contact for so long with such burning renunciation and godliness made it impossible for them to return to the world. Surendra Nath Mitra said to them, "Brothers, where will you go? Let us hire a house where you will live together, and where we householders shall find a temporary refuge from our worldly cares. I used to contribute a trifle towards the expenses of the Cossipore garden. I shall gladly continue that bit of help and you can at least have a roof over your heads and lead a simple life." The young monks gratefully accepted the offer.

A house was engaged at Baranagore, the first monastery of

the Sannyasin disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. Gopal Junior, the young lay devotee, moved the Master's bedding and other things there from Cossipore. Tarak and Gopal Senior were the first regular inmates. Narendra, Rakhal, Shashi, Sharat, Baburam, and Niranjana used to visit the monastery every now and then. In a short time, however, they stayed there permanently. Kali, Latu, and Yogin went first to Vrindaban with the Holy Mother. The first two returned to the Math in the course of a few months, and the last in a year. They were followed by Sarada and Subodh. And last came Gangadhar, Hari, and Tulasi. All of them were real Sannyasins now, with new aspirations and new modes of life.¹ The pivot of their thoughts was Sri Ramakrishna. The holy relics of the Master were brought to the Math from Balaram's house, and a regular worship of him as the Guru, according to the injunctions laid down in the scriptures, was undertaken by the brotherhood.

Thus the Master's dearly cherished ideal of monasticism took a concrete shape after his passing. The credit of it must go to Surendra. It was his generous heart that helped to lay the first brick of this citadel of a new order of monks in the soil of Bengal. He it was who looked after the infant monastery like a mother and guided it through a hundred adverse circumstances. Afterwards several other lay devotees joined hands with him in this labour of love.

The task of rallying together those young men who subsequent to the passing of the Master had gone back home and resumed their studies, fell naturally on Narendra Nath whom the Master himself had appointed their guardian. Though busy with his own domestic affairs, he lost no time in fulfilling the sacred trust that had been imposed upon him. He often visited these young disciples at their homes, dragged them from their studies, and injected into their drooping hearts the fiery message

¹ Though the formal ceremony took place later, we give here the monastic names by which they afterwards came to be known. Narendra became Swami Vivekananda. Rakhal and Yogin became Swamis Brahmananda and Yogananda; Baburam and Niranjana, Premananda and Niranjanananda; Shashi and Sharat, Ramakrishnananda and Saradananda; Latu and Hari, Adbhutananda and Turiyananda; Sarada and Gopal Senior, Trigunatitananda and Advaitananda; Tarak and Kali, Shivananda and Abhedananda; and Gangadhar, Subodh and Tulasi, Akhandananda, Subodhananda and Nirmalananda. Some years after, the list was completed by Hariprasanna under the name of Swami Vijnanananda.

of renunciation. Disregarding their vacillations, he would spend hours in delineating the soul-stirring realizations of the Master. Often he would burst like a whirlwind upon them and drag them to the Baranagore Math. There he would spend with them hour after hour in discussion, music, or chant. Soon their minds changed and they realized that it was inconsistent to yearn for renunciation and at the same time to cling to the world.

Sometimes their guardians would come to induce them to return home. They would argue, implore, weep, or threaten, but all to no purpose, for the monks were inexorable. Some of the guardians laid the whole blame upon Narendra Nath. Rakhal said to his father, "Why do you take the trouble to come here? I am all right. Please bless me, and forget all about me. Let me, too, forget you." This was the typical mental attitude of all. After obtaining a glimpse of divine bliss, they abhorred the world with its fascinations. They felt that they must realize God then and there, or die in the attempt.

The Holy Mother tried to overcome her sense of irreparable loss by undertaking a vigorous course of Sadhana at Vrindaban, Calcutta, or her native village. One part of the pre-ordained purpose of her union with Sri Ramakrishna had been fulfilled, viz the setting up of an ideal for the householders of today to follow according to their respective capacities. There still remained another part to be accomplished, viz the transmission of the Master's spiritual power to thousands of devotees, and specially to women. It was for this that her valuable life was spared to humanity for many years.

The householder devotees were also seized with a tremendous hankering for realization after separation from the Master. Nag Mahashay, in particular, became almost mad for it. He spent days at a time without food or sleep, praying, meditating, and weeping. Friendly persuasions proved futile. When the news reached the monks at Baranagore, Narendra Nath with Hari and Gangadhar went to see him in Calcutta. They found him in his hut lying under a quilt, writhing in agony for God. Narendra said, "We are your guests today." His intention was to make him eat under this plea. Nag Mahashay jumped up, cheerfully purchased food in the market—there was nothing in the hut—cooked it and entertained his guests. But he himself would not eat. At Narendra's importunities, he only struck his

head with the cooking-pot, saying, "Shall I give food to this wretched body when it has not yet realized God!" Narendra, however, managed somehow to make him eat before leaving.

Mahendra, Balaram, Girish, Devendra, and others were also deeply shocked at the Master's death. They wept in solitude and occasionally visited the brothers at the new monastery. They were comforted when they saw the lamp of spirituality burning in these ardent souls as bright as in the days of Cossipore, and realized that the Master, though physically absent, was present in spirit. These young monks represented, as it were, the collective aspect of the Master—as if enfranchised from the body, he himself were manifest in multiple forms.

During the latter part of December, 1886, some young disciples of the Master at the Baranagore monastery and in Calcutta went to Antpur at the invitation of Baburam's mother. Here Narendra gathered the young aspirants and in the fervour of spiritual enthusiasm which was evoked here, the bond of fellowship among them was definitely sealed. The enthusiasm reached its heights, quite unconsciously, on Christmas Eve, when before a burning log of wood Narendra and his brothers kept vigil, talking passionately of the life of Christ and the glories of renunciation. This stirred up the dormant spirit of renunciation in those who had lagged behind, and shortly after their return, the Baranagore monastery had its full complement of monks, all pledged to a life of the highest asceticism.

No chronicler can do full justice to the intense spiritual life these young monks led at Baranagore. Those were days of illumination, rapture, and ecstasy. The more they felt the absence of the Master on the physical plane, the more intense was their desire to realize him as the expression of eternal Truth in the recesses of their hearts. The glimpses of Light which they, now and then, experienced only whetted their passion to possess it permanently. These boys literally became mad after God. No amount of privation or hardship, indifference or contumely, was allowed to stand in their way. They were dead to the external world. A blazing fire raged within their souls. Doubts and disappointments there were now and then, but these were mere passing phases in the spiritual struggle like

little patches of cloud that hide the sun for a moment and then disappear.

Fired with the tales of the tremendous austerities of Sri Ramakrishna, these monks practised them to a great extent as regards food, dress, and other necessities of life. Literally they proved that man does not live by bread alone. Their food was the simplest that could be conceived. Rice, with or without salt, and boiled Neem or Bimba leaves were the food which these youths, accustomed to luxurious living, subsisted. Sometimes they could not procure even these. Then they would shut the door and spend day and night in song and prayer. One piece of cloth and two pieces of loin-cloth were all that any could boast of in the way of clothing. Satisfied with such food and raiment, they practised devotional exercises either in the Math premises or in the adjoining cremation ground, where they would go at dead of night and pass hours in prayer and meditation. The curious part of it was that the more numerous the obstacles, the greater was their zeal for realization.

How to realize God was their one thought. Character-building and realization became the watch-words of their life. They abhorred preaching. Some even thought of ending their lives by continued meditation without food. At that time they lived and moved and had their being in their spirit of God. Narendra was their leader. He was alive to the difficulties of the religious path. So, with the utmost caution he began to mould their lives. He tried to broaden their outlook by saturating their minds with universal ideas, and making them conversant with the essentials of the different branches of human knowledge. The topics he took up for discussion were many and varied, ranging from comparative religion and philosophy to history and science. Narendra had a gigantic intellect; and his personality was overwhelming. No wonder, therefore, that his brother-disciples looked upon him with the highest veneration, considering him to be the mouthpiece of Sri Ramakrishna himself. Most of the sublime ideas which he afterwards gave to the world as the great Swami Vivekananda, were not new, except in the way in which they were expressed, to these brother monks, for they had heard them in the Baranagore days, or even earlier at Cossipore.

Shashi was like the mother of them all. His entire Sadhana

consisted in faithfully conducting the worship of Sri Ramakrishna and serving his brother-disciples. "He was the main pillar of the Math," said Swami Vivekananda referring to him: "Without him life in the monastery would have been impossible. Often the monks would be lost in prayer and meditation, with no thought of food, and Shashi would wait with their meals ready, or even drag them out of their meditation." Rakhal was the 'Raja' of the brotherhood. He too, was overpowered with an intense idea of Vairagya. Often he thought of going to a solitary place, such as the banks of the sacred Narmada, to meditate. Kali was the most assiduous student of the Math. In addition to his spiritual practices, he would shut himself in his room and pore over his books—Vedanta, the Upanishads, or Western philosophy. The others also dived deep in the search for spiritual jewels, every one according to his taste. Not a moment was lost.

After some time even the holy atmosphere of the Baranagore Math seemed to become constricting to them ; they were anxious to go out into the wide world and live as wandering monks, depending solely on God. So, one by one they went, determined to tread the path of austerity and renunciation hallowed by the footsteps of the ancient Indian monks. But not Shashi—he chose to stay by the sacred relics of the Master.

They wandered all over the country from the Himalayas to Cape Comorin, relying solely upon God. How faithful they were in their austerities ! They had to undergo the travails of a new birth to become the spiritual giants the world knew later. They had left behind their near and dear ones ; they stamped out their heart's desires, and suffered the anguish and agony that all seers and saints have had to endure. But behind this metamorphosis there was the constant and unerring hand of the Man who chiselled their characters, curbed the impetuosity of their spirit, held tight the reins that directed their course, and brought about their perfection. The immense possibilities which at the very first sight Sri Ramakrishna had detected in them, and openly prophesied for them, were materialised in the fullness of time. As a matter of fact, everyone of these young men whom the Master had made his very own, represented one or more phases of his own multiple personality. The great qualities of head and heart which have found their expression in these

spiritual giants—in those who have passed away as well as in those who are still living—give us some idea, at least, of how wonderful must have been the illustrious Prototype in whom these qualities appeared in the highest degree. When Swami Vivekananda rose to the highest pinnacle of his fame, when East and West vied with each other to honour him, this was the tribute he paid to his Master:

“If there has been anything achieved by me, by thoughts, or words, or deeds, if from my lips has ever fallen one word that has helped any one in the world, I lay no claim to it, it was *his*. But if there have been curses falling from my lips, if there has been hatred coming out of me, it is all mine, and not his. All that has been weak has been mine, and all that has been life-giving, strengthening, pure, and holy, has been his inspiration, his words, and he himself. Yes, my friends, the world has yet to know that man.”

CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE

- 1775 Birth of Khudiram.
- 1791 Birth of Chandra Devi.
- 1805 Birth of Ramkumar.
- 1814 Khudiram settles at Kamarpukur.
- 1826 Birth of Rameshwar.
- 1835 Khudiram's visit to Gaya.
- 1836 Birth of Sri Ramakrishna, 18th February, about 5-15 a.m.
- 1843 Death of Khudiram.
- 1845 Sri Ramakrishna's holy thread ceremony.
- 1850 Ramkumar opens his *tol* in Calcutta.
- 1852 Sri Ramakrishna comes to Calcutta.
- 1853 Birth of the Holy Mother, 22nd December.
- 1855 Dakshineswar Kali Temple founded. Hriday at Dakshin-
eswar. Sri Ramakrishna appointed first priest of the
Vishnu temple and then of the Kali temple.
- 1856 Death of Ramkumar. Realization and first God-intoxi-
cated state of Sri Ramakrishna.
- 1857 Sri Ramakrishna's treatment under Gangaprasad.
- 1858 Haladhari, priest at Dakshineswar. Sri Ramakrishna goes
to Kamarpukur.
- 1859 Sri Ramakrishna's marriage.
- 1860 Return to Dakshineswar. Mathur's vision.
- 1861 Death of Rani Rasmani. Meeting with the Brahmani.
Tantra practice under the Brahmani. Second divine
madness.
- 1863 Completion of the Tantra practice. Meeting with
Pundit Padmalochan. Chandra Devi comes to live at
Dakshineswar.
- 1864 Sri Ramakrishna's practice of the Vatsalya Bhava under
Jatadhari. Practice of the Madhura Bhava. Initiation
into Sannyasa by Totapuri.
- 1865 Akshay replaces Haladhari. Totapuri leaves Dakshin-
eswar.
- 1866 Sri Ramakrishna in the Advaita plane for six months.
Illness. Practice of Mohammedanism.
- 1867 Sri Ramakrishna at Kamarpukur. Brahmani takes leave.

- 1868 Pilgrimage. Meeting with Ganga Mai.
- 1870 Tour with Mathur. Sri Ramakrishna at the Colootollah Harisabha. Visit to Kalna and Navadwip.
- 1871 Death of Mathur.
- 1872 The Holy Mother's first visit to Dakshineswar. The Shodashi Puja.
- 1873, Death of Rameshwar.
- 1874 The Holy Mother again at Dakshineswar.
- 1875 Sri Ramakrishna's first visit to Keshab Chandra Sen. Last visit to Kamarpukur.
- 1876 Death of Chandra Devi.
- 1877 } Intimacy with Keshab. The Holy Mother's third visit
- 1878 } to Dakshineswar.
- 1879 Coming of disciples begins.
- 1880 Meeting with Rakhal and Narendra Nath.
- 1881 Dismissal of Hriday.
- 1882 Visit to Pundit Vidyasagar. The Holy Mother again at Dakshineswar.
- 1884 Death of Keshab. Meeting with Pundit Shashadhar. Gopala's Mother. The Holy Mother comes to live at Dakshineswar for the last time.
- 1885 Last visit to Panihati. Illness and removal to Shyampukur. Association with Dr. Sarkar.
- 1886 Treatment at Cossipore. Organization of disciples. Mahasamadhi, 16th August, 1-2 a.m.

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G. V. Sarveswara Rao
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G. V. Sarveswara Rao

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PREFACE

THE first comprehensive life of the Holy Mother was published by us in English in 1940 under the title *Sri Sarada Devi*. It ran into a second edition in 1949. As one of the items of its programme, the Central Committee of the Holy Mother Centenary Celebrations at the Belur Math Head Quarters resolved in 1953, to bring out a standard volume on the life of the Holy Mother in English, Bengali and other languages. The task of writing this Life devolved on Swami Gambhirananda. Accordingly, he wrote in Bengali the Life of the Holy Mother entitled *Sri Ma Sarada Devi*. This was published by the Udbodhan Centre, Calcutta, on December 27, 1953, the first Centennial anniversary of the birth of the Holy Mother. The learned author has left no stone unturned to make the Life exhaustive and interesting by incorporating as many facts and incidents of the Mother's life as could be gleaned from all reliable sources, oral and documentary. The main narrative is profusely interspersed with conversations of the Mother and, consequently, the book ably fills the place of an authentic volume on the Life of the Holy Mother.

The Central Committee had also decided that the English Life should be published by us. It was at the request of the Central Committee that Swami Gambhirananda himself translated the Bengali book into English. We are happy to present this book to the public as the fulfilment of a resolution adopted in August 1954, by the Holy Mother Birth Centenary Committee, Madras. The original intention was to publish this book during the Centenary year, 1954. But, mainly owing to the preoccupations with the Centenary Celebrations in the city, the plan could not be given effect to in time.

Some footnotes of the original work have been omitted from the present volume, and many have been added to

explain Bengali manners and customs. A few facts that came to light after the publication of the Bengali book have also been included in the body of this volume.

The life of the Holy Mother serves as a beaconlight lighting up the obscure pathways of spiritual life and as a fountain at which humanity can slake its thirst for a higher life. We earnestly hope that the interest awakened in the hearts of the public by the Centenary Celebrations will assure us a wide circle of readers.

We are deeply beholden to Prof. Sudhanshukumar Sen Gupta, M.A., Ph.D. (Leeds) and Prof. S. Ramaswamy, M.A., for carefully editing the manuscripts of the book.

November, 1955

P U B L I S H E R.



SRI RAMAKRISHNA PARAMAHAMSA

PRELUDE

God, as associated with His Power, is alone able to set in motion a new cycle of social and spiritual regeneration; else it is impossible to conceive of the Absolute Brahman as involved in any process of evolution. When God incarnates as man, He invokes this Power and then employs Her for the good of men. Divine Power, thus propitiated by the Lord Himself, becomes gracious and suitably rearranges the factors concerned for the advancement of erring and perplexed humanity. Not only this, when God comes down as man, Divine Power also accompanies Him most often as a woman. The descent of Sita with Ramachandra, Sri Radhika with Krishna, Yasodhara with Buddha, and Vishnupriya with Sri Chaitanya emphasizes this fact. In truth, Divine Power, whether on the spiritual or on the material plane, or as the consort of an incarnation, helps Him immensely in His mission. Divorced from Power, His divine drama cannot be enacted, nor can it be comprehended by us.

Swami Saradananda, writes, 'Having discovered the eternal association of Power with Consciousness, the Rishis of India worshipped in all exceptionally energetic things and everywhere the Deity Who dances on the prostrate body of Siva. This incomparable Deity Who promises both blessing and protection with Her hands at the same time that She wears a necklace of heads, was discovered by them as a reality and as such worshipped reverentially in the guru who is the spiritual guide, in women who fascinate the world and in such elevating and degrading qualities as knowledge, forbearance, peace, delusion, torpor, error, etc. Having thus themselves attained all that men can aspire after, they taught others how to be blessed by treading the same path' (*Bharate-Shakti-puja*, p.20).

Again, Swami Vivekananda realized that this Sakti (Divine Power) had been awakened by Sri Ramakrishna

for the rejuvenation of the present age; and hence he sent forth this clarion call: 'Just imagine in your mind the acme of that resurgence with whose first stirrings the whole world is now resounding, and give up all vain doubt and weakness to which slave nations easily succumb.' That formless and eternal Power of Brahman which inheres in everything has again descended as the consort of the incarnation for the present age. She has on the one hand helped Him to fulfil His mission, and on the other has spread Her influence on various fields of human relationships, thereby removing obstacles and setting India, and, along with her, the whole world, on a new road to progress. Therefore it is that Swami Vivekananda who was blessed by them both, salutes them thus: 'A slave am I to both of you; and to both do I prostrate myself.'

Not only has the descent of God a particular technique of its own, but the manifestation of His Power also has its own mode. Or to put it otherwise, though the time and the purpose are the same for the incarnation of God and His Power, which are inseparable like fire and heat, yet the objective is attained through the masculine body in one way and through the feminine in another. Thus it is that even though the entity cannot be split up, there is a special value in following separately the events that accompany the feminine counterpart.

In the *Chandi* (XI. 54-55) the Goddess says: 'Whenever there arises any obstacle from the demons, I shall come down in this way to destroy the enemy'. In olden times there was constant need for destroying the demons, as they oppressed good and bad men alike. Their destructive power is not however confined to the physical plane. The constant conflict that rages in human hearts between good and evil tendencies is also described in the Upanishads as a battle waged by the demons against the forces of goodness. In the present age, this struggle has assumed the form of a challenge thrown out by disbelief, materialism, and sensuality to belief in

God, faith in the immortality of the soul, and adherence to godliness. It is in consequence of this challenge that there has been a growth of irreligion, envy, enmity, and passion which are a constant source of war resulting in the loss of innumerable valuable lives.

The conflict on the psychological plane in the modern age is even more devastating than the old mythological war between the gods and the demons. The old antagonism seldom overstepped the limits of the physical world; but the present struggle has originated in the mental plane and is spreading to all spheres of everyday life, thus laying the axe at the very root of humanity. Hence the action of the Divine Power under existing circumstances has to be mainly on the mental plane. Above everything else, the present-day world needs moral progress and spiritual enlightenment. If faith, purity, and devotion can once attain supremacy, the outer world is bound to change. The incarnate Divine Power is, therefore, now engaged in fighting internal enemies. The victory may come either by liquidating the sinner together with his sin or by transforming him through the natural attraction of genuine good feelings. The conversion of a heinous heart through moral excellence, presupposes a greater strength than is necessary for killing an enemy outright. So in the present incarnation there is no clanging of weapons or the din of war; but there is an abundance of modesty, humility, purity, goodness, practical love, and spiritual experience. Moreover, the Deity has not only to remove obstacles. She has also to establish new goals and create fresh aspirations; and this is a tremendous task. God Himself need not come down for removing all hindrances from the path of His devotees. This can be accomplished by an inspired soul or by a partial divine manifestation. As the whole of humanity has to be raised to a higher pitch of realization, Divine Power Herself takes the field.

The emergence of the Divine Power today on the hoary background of Indian culture is indicative of a unique reanimation. Particularly is it bound to be so

among women, the need of whose advancement is admitted on all hands. We cannot do better than echo the words of Swami Vivekananda who was convinced that India cannot prosper without revitalising her womanhood, just as a bird cannot fly with one wing: 'And therefore it is that when God incarnated as Sri Ramakrishna, he worshipped God as Kali, the Mother, accepted a woman as his guru (spiritual guide), assumed the role of a woman in some of his spiritual strivings, took upon himself the responsibility of educating and training his own wife, and preached the Motherhood of God'.

In the middle of the last century the womanhood of India was faced with a tremendous problem. India then was being swept off her feet by foreign ideals. A craze for imitating the West set in at the cost of indigenous values. The plan of educational reform envisaged in the despatch of Sir Charles Wood, dated 19th July, 1854, gave only a vague indication of the kind of training that Indian women would get. True it is that India was not entirely wrong in welcoming foreign ideas and practices. On the contrary, it is quite in keeping with Indian tradition to enrich her life by assimilating foreign ideas while still retaining her own individuality. There is need for energizing our womanhood by drawing a little on foreign sources in order to make national life more vigorous and fruitful, at the same time that the West also learns something of our 'veneration for motherhood, so that Western civilization may have a stronger spiritual basis and a longer lease of life. But though each civilization has much to learn from another, it will spell disaster if the basic distinctions are ignored. For, though women are honoured everywhere, that honour very often appears in the form of chivalry and appreciation of feminine charms. But India eulogizes chastity and motherhood, since the ideal aimed at is spiritual freedom which has for its foundation absolute self-control. Our ideal specimens of womanhood are Sita, Savitri, and Damayanti. There is an evident conflict between the two standpoints; and

future world civilizations have either to choose sides or seek a rational rapprochement. The problem has assumed an urgency which it never had a hundred years ago. And yet the forces governing the destiny of India foresaw that unless Indian culture was saved from the deluge of modern ideas, the world would have no sure foundation on which the future Eastern and Western social edifices could be erected, while allowing for individual differences. There was need for providing a dependable model in the combined figure of guru, mother and deity from which all could draw the necessary inspiration.

Considered from all points of view, this task of resuscitating and perfecting the Indian ideal could be accomplished by none other than the Mother of the Universe Herself; for in the middle of the last century no other force could succeed in making India conscious of her grand destiny and the world cognizant of her revitalizing message. This is the age-old tradition of India's spiritual ministry. Truly God's advent has been strictly in proportion to the moral degradation during the period beginning from the eighteen fifties and ending with the nineteen twenties. The greater the degradation the greater is the Divine Power's response to the challenge of the times. The new advances of world civilization will commence with the worship of the guru, mother, and goddess as manifested in the recent past.

Sri Krishna hints in the *Gita*, that though God descends to the human world for the general good, men through the poverty of their intellect fail to gauge His real stature, hidden as He remains under His assumed mundane limitations. And thus, paradoxically enough, the conditions of Divine descent were frustrating His gracious intention. Notwithstanding this drawback, it is only through those human bodies that God can reveal to erring and suffering humanity the means by which life can be made divine; for sunk as men are in their petty selfish pursuits, there is no other method for reinvigorating them for higher achievements. This transmission of fresh vigour and

the communication of revitalizing power may follow different channels. In some cases the highest perfection of human ideals may be visibly demonstrated or they may be made more sublime and enduring through achievements of personal life or through grandeur of instruction; in other cases new paths may be opened up by divine decree; while in still others, human hearts may be more powerfully attracted towards cherished traditional human norms through charming divine disports. While all this is true, we must not jump to the conclusion that the mission of an incarnation is confined to a mere heightening of sublimity, or the establishment of fresh ideals, or the attraction of human hearts. For, though we may try to understand his contribution analytically, we have to remember that it is beyond human capacity fully to comprehend or formulate in words the significance of an incarnation, inasmuch as he is the embodiment of all kinds of spiritual moods. Besides, a power that is released for ages, cannot be assessed by contemporary history. Nevertheless, we accept these three standards as a basis for an intellectual apprehension of the life of the Holy Mother, wherein we shall see the qualities of motherhood in their superhuman perfection, and we shall come to know how they acted in the present age for evolving new spiritual values. We shall also see how in her life the feminine virtues consequent on such positions in the family as daughter, sister, wife, or matron, reached their ideal states, and above all, how her pristine purity was itself an inspiration to others.

Is this all sentimental ebullition or a faint hint at reality? We invite the reader to raise this question again after finishing this biography; but we are convinced that he himself will discover the truth ere long and be freed from doubt. But he must be forewarned that the life we are dealing with is in many respects extraordinary, and it must be evaluated accordingly. The Holy Mother does not belong to that class of dazzling personalities who suddenly emerge in contemporary history and after assuming

superhuman proportion for a while vanish for ever, nor to that category of people who through bustling activity, flaming oratory, or the clatter of arms imperil human civilization and blacken history for ever. She belongs to that galaxy of great characters who by concretizing the human ideals in their lives raise world civilization to a higher level and whose influence, though seemingly inconsiderable to their contemporaries, lasts longer and expands for ever. In fact, she is to be classed with such memorable figures as Sati and Sita whose advent purified human life and blazed the path for a fresh resurgence.

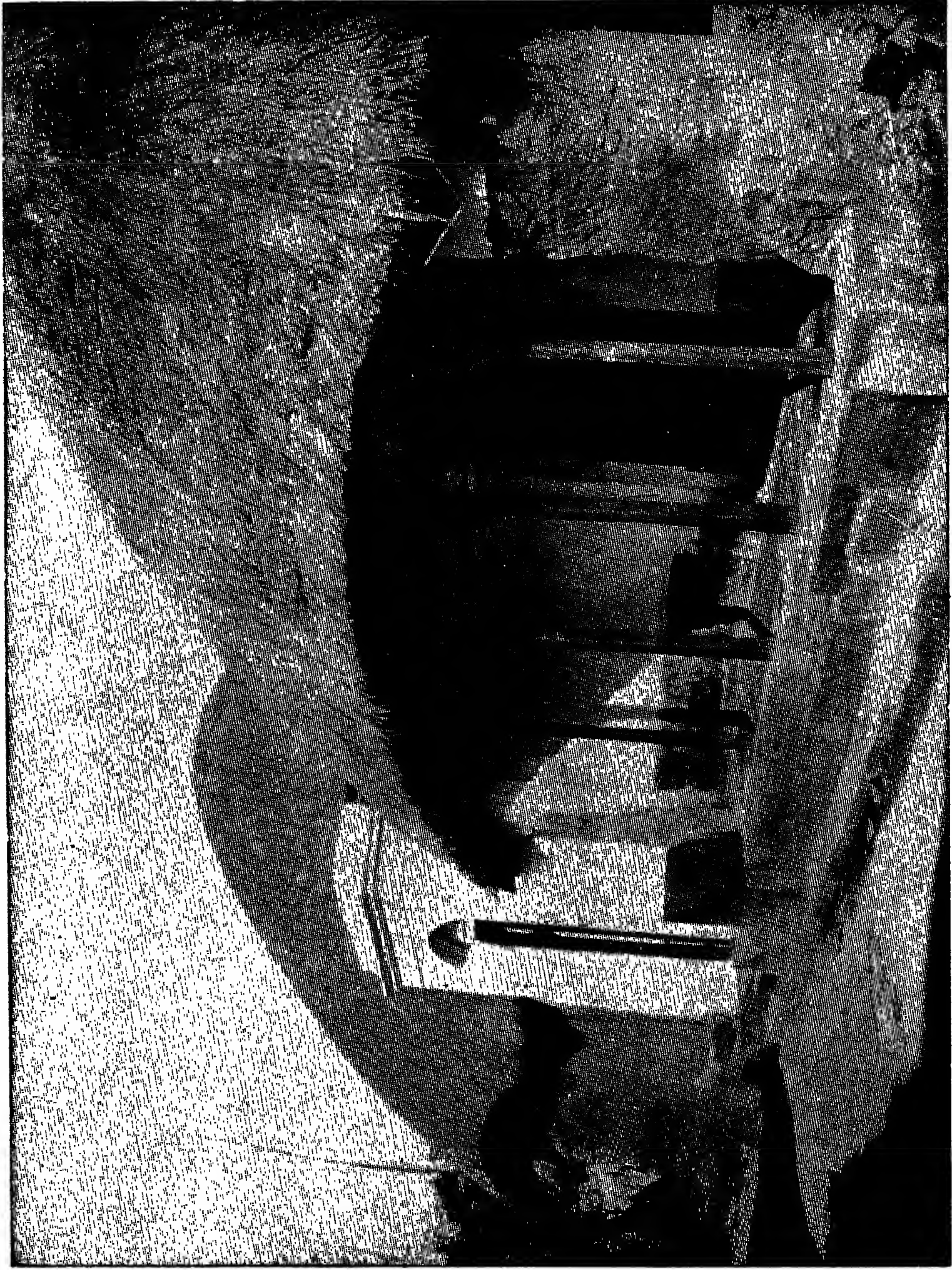
All this is unquestionable. But still another question remains: 'If the Power descended for the world as a whole, why should it have selected for its field an insignificant remote hamlet like Jayrambati, detached as it is from all modern influences?' Who can answer such a question? And, in fact, how many of those questions can we answer that arise in connection with the unpredictable movements of that inscrutable Power that ever creates, sustains, and dissolves the world? And yet human intellect, though aware of its limitations, cannot desist from the quest. So we cogitate, 'Had Jayrambati any speciality, because of which it had such a proud privilege?' Even a close scrutiny does not reveal any such, though the pages of history bear witness to the facts of Krishna's advent in Kamsa's prison and his childlike and boyish disports among cowherds, of Jesus's birth in a stable and his early training in a carpenter's house, and the descent of Ramakrishna in a husking shed and his subsequent life as a poor temple priest. And sociology points to the fact, that when under the impact of an aggressive foreign culture, the learned and moneyed classes in the towns are swept off their feet, indigenous culture maintains a precarious existence in the poor surroundings of remote villages. Moreover, Indian culture discovered a peculiar mode of self-perpetuation by entrusting itself into the hands of indigent Brahmins and penniless gurus. Had Jayrambati these factors in abundance?

THE BLESSED HAMLET

Bankura, though it belongs to the fertile province of West Bengal, is comparatively barren and subject to frequent famine. But the little village of Jayrambati, lying at the south-east corner of the district, is more fortunate and ever smiles with the crops of paddy, wheat, sugar-cane, and vegetables which the industrious farmers grow in its fields. It is about three miles west of Kamarpukur, the native village of Sri Ramakrishna, and is under the Siromanipur outpost of the main police station at Kotulpur within the Vishnupur sub-division of the District. From the north-western corner of the hamlet the small, perennial rivulet Amodar, with its transparent water, meanders eastward for a mile like a playful child, demarcating the northern limits of Jayrambati; then taking a south-easterly turn it washes the boundary of Mukundapur which forms a part of Kamarpukur, and then flows southward. The narrow and shallow stream forms whirlpools here and there, which are deep and full of fish, so that small alligators are often attracted there. In the northern side of the village, the streamlet forms a beautiful peninsula, triangular in shape and raised in the centre. The green grass and tall trees which cover it make it a cool retreat for those who want a shelter from the day's heat, and the solitude is heightened by the signs of cremation here and there, inviting those who are sick of the worries of the world. Resounding with the chirping of birds and decorated with fruit and flower trees as it was, it was a favourite place for Swami Saradananda, Yogin-Ma, Golap-Ma, and others who after a dip in the brook sat under the *amalaka* (*emblic myrobalan*) tree which adorned its centre in those days; and there they meditated or read the *Gita* or the *Chandi* for a considerable time. The Mother in her younger days took her ceremonial bath in this stream on special days.



THE HOLY MOTHER



HOLY MOTHER'S PARENTAL HOME AT JAYRAMBATI

The natural situation of Jayrambati is very fine. It is surrounded almost on all sides by extensive fields. The land between the Amodar and the village is about half a mile in width and is very fertile. Such staple crops as paddy, pulses, chilli, and turmeric, as well as ordinary vegetables, are raised on this and adjacent lands by a diligent peasantry whose wants are few. Cotton, too, used to be cultivated and the ponds had plenty of fish. It is said that the hamlet began to have such abundance only after the birth of the Holy Mother. It had then no shops; and yet the people did not depend on other villages. They were satisfied with what they got from their fields. Whenever necessity arose, they went to the market at Kamarpukur which supplied them with sweets, or to Kotulpur, six miles to the north, from where they got clothes, salt and spices, or to Kayapat-Badanganj, five or six miles to the south-west. At Shihar (or Shiod, as it is locally pronounced), one mile to the west, there were some grocer's shops, and there was another at Pukure, about a mile and a half away, which helped the people of Jayrambati in an emergency. North of Jayrambati, on the other side of the Amodar and across a vast field, is a large village called Desra (pronounced as Deshda). On the east, too, across a vast stretch of paddy fields, one comes to the bank of the Amodar, after crossing which one has to pass through Amarapur to reach Kamarpukur. The track has now been made wider and easier for traffic, and it is dotted on either side by big shady trees under which the cow-boys and pedestrians can take rest or shelter.

The Mukhopadhyaya (or briefly Mukherji) family in which the Holy Mother was born, settled in this village long ago. Apart from these Mukherjis and the Banerjis who are related to the former, there is no Brahmin family there. The rest of the villagers are non-Brahmins bearing such family titles as Vishwas, Mandal, Ghosh, and Samui. The Brahmins, together with a few families of milkmen, one of barbers, one of sweetmeat makers, one of

blacksmiths, and a few families of Bagdis, inhabit about a hundred small mud houses where they live their unostentatious rural life. We are not aware of any indisputable theory about the origin of the name of the village, though one may guess that it might have been derived from the name of the tutelary deity or of an ancestor of the Mukherjis.

The villagers used to bathe in and draw their drinking water from the big tank with tall palm trees on its banks called the Badujye-pukur (or the tank of the Banerjis) in the southern part of the village. Further south there is an ancient tank with blooming lotuses. On the western side of the village is a big tank called the Aher on which the cultivators depend for water for irrigation. An old pond, called the Punya-pukur, occupies a central position. On its western bank is the 'new house' of the Holy Mother, built in 1916. On that bank again at the northern side is a small thatch opening to the south which is the old chapel of the Mukherjis. In one of its rooms there is an emblem of the deity Dharma¹ called Sundara-Narayana, which is of the form of a tortoise and which the Mukherjis worship by turns. The other room is called the Kali-mado where the goddess Kali used to be worshipped every year. This worship ceased subsequently as a result of family differences. In this room, again, sat the village school where the little boys and girls gathered, with leaves for writing under their arms and crisp scorched rice (*mudi*) for tiffin tied at the ends of their clothes. At the north-east corner of this room was a black-stone, the emblem of the goddess Shashthi who grants children to worshippers and protects them. Newly married couples used to come to salute this deity; and we fancy that Sri Ramakrishna and the Holy Mother, too, did so. Shashthi now sits in Sundara-Narayana's room. On the southern side of the village road that runs over the southern bank of the Punya-pukur is the Modal-pada, the quarter of the

1. Literally, virtue or right norm, deified in Buddhism.

Modals; and to the south of this place is the shrine of Simhavahini¹ who along with two of her female companions—Chandi and Mahamaya—occupies a seat, a separate seat being provided for Manasa, the serpent goddess. The Mukherjis are the hereditary priests of all these deities. At the time that we are writing of, Simhavahini was housed in a thatch; but now she sits in a more substantial house with a cement floor and a corrugated iron sheet roof.

On the southern bank of the Punya-pukur is the homestead of the Banerjis. From the old brick-built temple, parlour, etc., it can be inferred that they were once in an affluent state. But now all these are in ruins.

The main road of the village runs north and south by the western side of the Mother's new house and the Kali shrine, both of which are on the Punya-pukur. As we proceed along this road a little northward, there stands on our left the white brick-built temple on the birth-place of the Mother. Here was the ancestral home of the Mukherjis who, however, spread out south-west with the growth of the family. Their houses lie to the west of the village road and open to the east. The ancient homestead had a thatch on the eastern side, which was divided into two parts, the outer one serving as a drawing-room. On the south were the kitchen and husking sheds. On the southern side of the present dwellings of the Mukherjis there is another road which, starting from the main village road, runs westward along the northern bank of the Kalu-gede (or Kalu's pond) and the southern side of the Ghosh-pada (Ghosh quarter) to join the road to Shihar on the northern bank of the Aher. On the extreme west of the Ghosh-pada is the brick-built temple of Dharma, known as Yatra-siddhi-raya, whose symbol is a small low stool with four legs.

Of the villages round about Jayrambati, with which the memories of Sri Ramakrishna or the Holy Mother are specially associated, mention may be made of Shihar, Koal-

1. i. e. one riding on a lion, an epithet of Durga.

para, Anur, and Shyambazar. At Shihar was married Hemangini Devi, the daughter of the paternal aunt of Sri Ramakrishna. It is also the birth-place of Shyama-sundari Devi, the mother of the Holy Mother. These common ties often attracted both the Master and the Mother to this village even from their childhood. The Mother used to halt at Koalpara when in later days, she passed through Vishnupur on her way to and from Calcutta. Anur is known for its shrine of the goddess Vishalakshi, on the way to which the Master while still a child passed into ecstasy. At Shyambazar he once joined a *kirtana*¹ party which sang the glory of the Lord continuously for seven days and nights. To the east of Jayrambati, on the other side of Amodar, is the big village of Tajpur; to the south is Jibta which houses the landlords of Jayrambati; to the southwest is Masinapur (or Masnepur); and to the west is Shihar. All these villages are within a mile of Jayrambati. West of Shihar is Shiromanipur which is inhabited by Mohammedans and which boasts of a police station.

Jayrambati, though not very far from Calcutta, is not easy of access, and roads were more difficult in the times we are writing of. In those days people trudged on through village roads and open fields, frequently infested with robbers. Only the rich few could afford the luxury of carts, palanquins, etc. One of these paths passed through Kamarpukur, Arambagh, and Tarakeshwar, the last place being noted for its Siva temple. Between Arambagh and Tarakeshwar lay a vast field called Telo-bhelo which was not safe even during daylight, so that people never crossed it alone or after nightfall. This was the shorter of the two routes usually followed by the people, the distance by it between Calcutta and Jayrambati being about sixty miles; and this was the path that the Holy Mother usually trod on her way to meet the Master at Dakshineshwar.

1. A particular type of religious songs sung singly or in chorus, with musical instruments like cymbals and drums to keep time.

The other route through Burdwan, which is a railway station, was a much longer one and withal not free from robbers. People now proceeding to Jayrambati usually travel by a night train from Calcutta to Vishnupur where they can get buses which ply up to Jayrambati in the dry months and up to Kotulpur in the wet, with the rest of the way, a distance of about six miles, to be covered on foot or by a cart according to convenience. A modern all-weather road up to Jayrambati is now (1953) under construction which may ultimately be extended to Kamarpukur.¹

Jayrambati, though thus shut out from modern civilization, does not lack in festivities. It has its rounds of annual celebrations. In autumn there is a three-day special worship of Simhavahini, the presiding deity of the village, which draws people from all parts. Besides, other days sacred to other gods and goddesses are duly observed with much eclat. On the Sivaratri day the villagers go to Shihar to offer worship at the temple of Shantinatha (Siva). There are also *kirtana* songs continued for twenty-four hours at a stretch and rural dramas on mythological subjects which are highly appreciated and largely patronized.

And above all, Jayrambati has been blessed by the advent of the Holy Mother, which has converted it into a place of pilgrimage where people from all over the world come to draw inspiration. The white dome of the temple, flying its metal pennant with the Bengali word 'ma' (mother) engraved on it, announces the glory of the village to distant passers-by. The temple was consecrated on the 19th April, 1923 (Akshaya Tritiya, according to the Hindu calendar), which day is still observed and is made joyous by the presence of hundreds of devotees hailing from different places. The worship of the goddess Jagad-dhatri, which was initiated by the Holy Mother's mother and for which the Mother herself made permanent arrangements, is also

1. This has since been extended to Kamarpukur.

performed annually and is equally popular with the devotees. The establishment of the branches of the Ramakrishna Math and of its sister institution the Ramakrishna Mission, which cater to the spiritual, mental, and physical needs of the villagers, has also enhanced the popularity of Jayram-bati, and easier accessibility is gradually converting it into a centre of attraction. It is a miracle that by the birth of the Holy Mother this insignificant hamlet should have leaped into such prominence within such a short time. The Mother herself placed on her head the dust of this hamlet and saluted it with the Sanskrit adage '*Jananī janmabhūmischa swargadapi gariyasi*' — mother and mother-country are superior to heaven itself.

THE ADVENT

We do not know when the Mukherjis came to Jayram-bati. From two old documents it appears that sometime in the middle of 1669 a certain King of Vishnupur, named Sri Chaitanya Simha, gifted about six acres of land, free of all rents, to one Khelaram, a forefather of the Mukherjis, for the maintenance of his family and for carrying on the worship of Dharma. From this it appears that the Mukherjis had been worshippers of the deity even earlier and might have come to the village in that capacity. This was perhaps during the transitional period in the history of Bengal when Buddhism was being absorbed into Hinduism together with its deities of whom Dharma, under various names, was one. But once the Mukherjis had set their feet in the village, they became the family priests of the Hindus near about and thus gradually established the supremacy of Hinduism, owing to which Simhavahini, the Hindu deity, whom too the Mukherjis worshipped, became the presiding goddess.

The site occupied by the Holy Mother temple was perhaps the first place where the Mukherjis settled. This is borne out by the Siva image in black-stone which was found underground when the foundation for the temple was being dug. This must have once been worshipped by the Mukherjis. The Mother lived here till she was nine years old, and this was also the place which witnessed her marriage. 'My marriage was celebrated in the old house,' she recounted. 'We shifted to the new house (which later fell to her brother Varada's share) when I was nine years old—when the old house became too small.'

Ramachandra, a worthy descendant of the Mukherjis, whose tutelary deity was Rama, was respected at Jayram-bati for his godliness, suavity of temper, and compassion for all. He married Shyamasundari Devi, daughter of Sri Haridas Mazumdar of Shihar. The wife, too, vied with

her husband in the practice of virtue. Her purity, simplicity, and fortitude were the talk of the village. The Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi was born of this pious couple. The few sentences which occasionally dropped from the Mother's lips with regard to her parents go to show how virtuous they were and in what veneration she held them. 'My parents,' she said, 'were very good. My father was a devout follower of Rama. He was very orthodox and would not accept any gift from people of other castes. How kind my mother was; how she would feed people, and how she took care of them! And how guileless she was!' And she added, 'My father liked smoking. But as he smoked, he was so simple and humble that he would address in a friendly way any passer-by who crossed his door, and would say, "Sit down, brother, and have a smoke." And then he himself would fill up pipe after pipe for him. Will the Lord be born where the parents are not self-composed?' About her mother she said, 'My mother was Lakshmi (goddess of fortune) herself, so to say. Throughout the year she would gather all sorts of things and keep them in order. She would say, "My household is for God and His devotees...". This household was, as it were, a part and parcel of her being. What pains did she not take to keep it in order!'

Ramachandra had three younger brothers—Trailokyanath, Ishwarchandra and Nilmadhav—all of whom lived together. This family was never prosperous and somehow made both ends meet with the little that was earned by farming and priesthood; and yet Ramachandra was unstinting in his charity, of which we shall have some proof in due course.

Once when Shyamasundari Devi was living with her father in the northern part of Shihar, she had occasion to sit in the dark beside a potter's oven under a bel (*bilva*, *aegle marmelos*) tree. There suddenly issued a jingling sound from the direction of the oven, and a little girl came down from the branches of the tree. She laid her soft hands round Shyama-

sundari's neck, whereupon she fell down unconscious. She had no idea how long she lay there thus. Her relatives came there searching for her and carried her home. On regaining consciousness she felt as though the little girl had entered her womb.

Ramachandra was then in Calcutta in search of some means of earning money for his family. The thought of his family's poverty weighed heavily on his mind. One day, before he had decided to start for the city, he was engrossed in that thought. Then he fell asleep and dreamt that a little girl of golden complexion embraced him from behind by throwing her delicate arms round his neck. The incomparable beauty of the girl, as also her invaluable ornaments, at once marked her as out of the common run. Ramachandra was greatly surprised and asked, 'Who are you, my child?' The girl replied in the softest and sweetest of voices, 'Here am I come to you.' Ramachandra woke up and the conviction grew in him that the girl was none other than Lakshmi, the goddess of fortune, whose appearance implied that the time was auspicious for him to go out in quest of money. Accordingly he left for Calcutta. We do not know how far Ramachandra was successful in his quest. All that we know is that after returning home he heard what had happened to his wife, and, spiritually-minded as he himself was, he readily believed everything. Henceforth this holy Brahmin couple lived the purest of lives in expectation of the divine child. Ramachandra had the highest regard for his wife and never touched her person till the birth of the Holy Mother. Shyamasundari Devi was conscious of her unique fortune, and long after she said to Yogin-Ma,¹ 'How beautiful I looked when I was in the family way, how thick were my tresses, and how many pieces of cloth were presented to me during that time!'

Gradually the time of confinement approached. Autumn had now passed, and it was the beginning of the

1. A lady devotee of the Master, and later a constant companion of the Mother.

month of Paush when winter had just set in. This was one of the happiest times in Bengal villages. The harvest was over and the granaries were full. The fields around again began to smile with the shooting forth of the summer crop. The new harvest festival had just been finished, and the little children were counting the days for the festival of the month-ending¹ when they would have a feast of cakes. The Christian world was eargly waiting for the merry Christmas day. The Tantrikas were busy paying visits to the Kali temples, especially as such visits were thought to be very meritorious in that month. And it was the day of winter solstice when the longest night was over and the sun was beginning its northward course—the day on which the Hindu gods and goddesses wake up from their long slumber of six months. During such a time, a little after Thursday evening, on the 8th Paush (22nd December, 1853) when the night had spread her star-spangled cloth over the village of Jayrambati to lay it asleep after the day's labour the blowing of conchshells from Ramachandra's house announced the happy news of the advent of Sri Saradamani Devi. Soon an astrologer was called in and in accordance with the disposition of the stars and planets at the time, the child was ceremonially named Thakurmani. Her more popular name was, however, Saradamani.²

Sarada was the first child of her parents. She was followed by a sister named Kadambini and then by five brothers named Prasannakumar, Umeshchandra, Kalikumar, Varadaprasad and Abhaycharan. Kadambini died childless.

1. Paush Samkranti, roughly corresponding to the winter solstice.

2. It is customary to have two names, one for astrological and the other for common use. We have it on the authority of Swami Gaurishwarananda, who had it from the Mother herself, that Kshemankari was the actual common name she was given. But her mother's sister, who had lost a daughter called Sarada, requested Shyamasundari Devi to change her child's name to Sarada, so that the bereaved lady might imagine that the new child was none other than her own, though in another form.

soon after her marriage with Sudharam Chakravarty of Kokanda. Umesh, too, died before marriage at the age of eighteen or nineteen. Abhay died just after passing out of a medical school, leaving behind him a widow and a daughter, of whom we shall have much to say in future. The other brothers grew up and set up separate houses and reared their own families. Uncle¹ Kali built his house south of the ancestral home. Uncle Varada's house was to the north-west of uncle Kali's. South-west of this house was the Kalu-gede (Kalu's pond) mentioned earlier, which was used by the Mukherjis for cleaning the household utensils. South of the Holy Mother temple and north of uncle Kali's house was the house of uncle Prasanna. The Mother spent a long part of her life in the cottage of uncle Prasanna, which has since been purchased by the authorities of the Ramakrishna Math and added to the Holy Mother temple properties, in which also are included the Punya-pukur and the new house of the Mother. North of this cottage was the gateway of the house of uncle Surya who was the son of Ishwarchandra Mukherji, one of the uncles of the Holy Mother. Her eldest uncle Trailokya was a Sanskrit scholar; but he died in youth soon after his marriage. The youngest uncle, Nilmadhav, remained a bachelor and never parted from Ramchandra.

After the death of Rampriya Devi, his first wife, uncle Prasanna married Suvasini Devi. He had two daughters—Nalini and Sushila (or Maku) by his first wife; and by his second wife he had two daughters, Kamala and Vimala, born during the Mother's life, and a son, Ganapati, born after her demise. Uncle Kali had two sons, Bhudev and Radharaman, by his wife Subodhbala Devi. We have already said that uncle Abhay left behind him his widow Surabala and an only daughter Radharani, affectionately called Radhu or Radhi. Uncle Prasanna had a moderate

1. The devotees of the Holy Mother consider her brothers and brothers' wives as their own uncles and aunts. And so also her nieces are their cousins whom they call 'sisters'.

supplementary income from his priestly services in Calcutta. Owing perhaps to an early life of poverty, he was very frugal in his ways. With the money he saved, he purchased paddy fields and bullocks and thus improved his condition. Kalikumar was irritable by nature. It is said that before his birth his mother became very much overwhelmed by the loss of some children, when with the help of some medicines given by a woman who worshipped the goddess Kali and with her blessings too, she got Kalikumar as her son; and that accounted for the boy's irascibility. Kali stayed at Jayrambati, and as an orthodox Brahmin he attended to his daily worship and the observance of ceremonies, so that he was greatly respected. Uncle Varada generally stayed at Jayrambati, though he often went to assist Prasanna at Calcutta.

The Mother spent her early days in a poor family; but poverty was in a sense a boon and made life sweeter by providing greater opportunity for her to reveal her affection for all around. Ramchandra could not raise enough paddy from his lands to meet the expenses of the family; so he grew some cotton also. Shyamasundari Devi would carry the little girl Sarada to the cotton field where she would lay her down and go to pluck the cotton pods. When Sarada grew up to be a little girl she would help her mother in this work as also in spinning sacred thread with the cotton, which would fetch some cash for cloth and other family requirements. Sarada had also to look after her brothers. 'I used to go with them,' she said, 'to bathe in the Ganges, that is, in the Amodar, which was our Ganges¹. After finishing our holy bath, I would eat with them some fried-rice there, and then bring them home. The Ganges had always an uncommon attraction for me.' As for other engagements, she said, 'As a girl I would plunge inot neck-deep water to cut grass for the cattle, and walk to the fields with fried-rice for the labourers. During

1. The popular belief, supported by scripture, is that all streams become as sacred as the Ganges at holy moments.

one year when locusts had nearly destroyed the crop, I went round the fields gathering paddy.' As regards her education she said, 'I sometimes accompanied Prasanna, Ramnath (a cousin), and others when they went to school in their boyhood; and thus I learnt a little.'

In addition to these brief and casual references to her childhood days, some information can be gathered from her contemporaries. Thus Sri Raj Mukherji's sister Aghormani Devi, a companion and playmate of the Mother's girlhood days, said, 'The Mother was very simple by nature; she was simplicity incarnate. Nobody had any altercation with her during childhood sports and games in which she very often played the master or the mistress of a house. She, of course, made dolls and played with them; but she preferred worshipping with flowers and bel leaves Kali and Lakshmi in images fashioned by herself. When other girls fell out, she would mediate, settle their quarrels, and re-establish cordial relations. Once during the worship of the goddess Jagad-dhatri, Sri Ramhriday Ghoshal of Haldepukur was present. Finding the Mother lost in meditation before the deity, he kept his eyes fixed on her for a long time; but as he could not make out as to who was the deity and who the Mother, he left the place in fear.' Other old people would say, 'From her young days, Sarada was as diligent in her work as she was intelligent, quiet, and well-behaved. She had never to be asked to work. Of her own accord and with her own resourcefulness she would meticulously perform her duties.'

The self-identification of the Mother with Jagad-dhatri in her meditation which became pronounced enough to awe a casual observer was not an isolated event in this unique life. The girlhood days of the Holy Mother were made surprisingly singular by a strange combination of divinity and humanity, with a predominance of the former, as it were. Whatever others might think of her in her later life, she then generally revealed herself in her human role. But at the time of which we are writing, it seems as

though she stood at the meeting point of heaven and earth and could not decide as to which side she should lean, fresh as she was from the world above; or it might have been that it was ordained from above that those early days should be divinely encompassed. So it is that the Holy Mother said with reference to those days, 'Mind you, my dear, as a girl I saw that another girl of my age always accompanied me, helped me in my work, and frolicked with me; but she disappeared at the approach of other people. This continued till I was ten or eleven years old.'¹ When she went into the water to cut grass for the cattle, there would appear a girl of the same age to assist her in the work. No sooner the Mother return from the shore after depositing a sheaf cut by the new girl, than she would find another sheaf kept ready in the meantime.

We have now an idea of how busy the Mother was in her early life. From her reminiscences of those days we also gather that she had off and on to undertake such hard tasks as cooking. But though she was a precocious and painstaking little girl, her hands were not strong enough for the whole arduous process, and so she had to call in her father for taking down heavy utensils from the fire-place. She had to fetch pitchers of water from the tank for domestic purposes, and she took this opportunity to learn swimming with the help of the pitcher.

When she was eleven years old (1864), the country-side was ravaged by a terrible famine. Her father had garnered some paddy; and though he was by no means affluent, he was moved so much by the appalling misery around that he opened his granary and started a free canteen. The Holy Mother described it thus: 'What a dire famine raged there once and how many starving people came to our house! We had stocked the previous year's produce. My father had the paddy husked into rice and got potfuls of *khichudi* (hotch-potch) cooked by mixing it with black len-

1. Much later, after the passing away of the Master, she had another vision of a similar girl (see the chapter on '*With The Devotees*').

tils. "Everybody in this house will eat this," he said, "and offer it to whoever may come. Only for my Sarada, a little rice of good variety will be cooked and she will eat it." On some days the number of people became so great that *khichudi* ran short. Cooking would restart at once. No sooner was the hot food served on the leaves, than I would fan it with both hands so that it might cool quickly. For, alas, the hungry stomachs could not brook delay! One day came a girl of either the (lowly) Bagdi or the Dome caste. The hair on her head had become shaggy for want of oil and her eyes were bloodshot like those of a lunatic. She ran to the tub where some rice-dust was soaked for the cattle and began gulping that. She wouldn't heed the people who were crying out, "Come in and eat the *khichudi*." Only after swallowing some rice-dust did she hear that call. Such, so dreadful, was the famine! After learning the bitter lesson of that year, people began to garner their paddy.'

From the vivid picture drawn up by the simple, unvarnished, and incomparable words of the Mother we find how busy she was seeking to cool by fanning with her soft, delicate hands the hot food for the starving people, she who in future would reign in the hearts of hundreds with the irresistible claim of a mother! And how full of affection for that tender darling of a child was the poor Brahmin! The Mother's life then was like that of any other girl in the village. But in the midst of this rural simplicity, now and then a sudden divine flash dazzles us. This interplay of light and shade could not perhaps entirely escape the notice of her brothers or of her parents who wanted to hug to themselves their small sister or smaller daughter as any other human being did. Perhaps because of the unforgettable impression of such moments of light, Shyamasundari Devi, mother of the Holy Mother, said in later life, 'My child, I wonder who you really may be, my dear! How can I recognize you, my daughter!' The daughter, of course, then brushed this compliment aside with apparent dislike,

saying, 'Who am I? Who can I be? Have I grown four hands (like any deity)? If so, why should I have come to you?' What Sarada Devi did as a sister becomes clear from a talk that she had one day with her mother. Shyamasundari Devi said, 'Sarada, may I have a daughter like you in my next life!' The daughter replied with a show of anger, 'You will drag me down again! To think that I should come again to bring up your children!' With the memory of the quiet diligence of her affectionate daughter still fresh in her mind, Shyamasundari Devi repeated with an obvious appeal, 'May I, indeed, get you again, my darling!' Uncle Kali, too, once reiterated this compliment when he said, 'Our sister is Lakshmi incarnate. She spared no pains to keep us alive. Husking paddy, spinning sacred thread, supplying the cattle with fodder, cooking,—in short, most of the household work was done single-handed by our sister.'

FORETASTE OF LIFE DIVINE

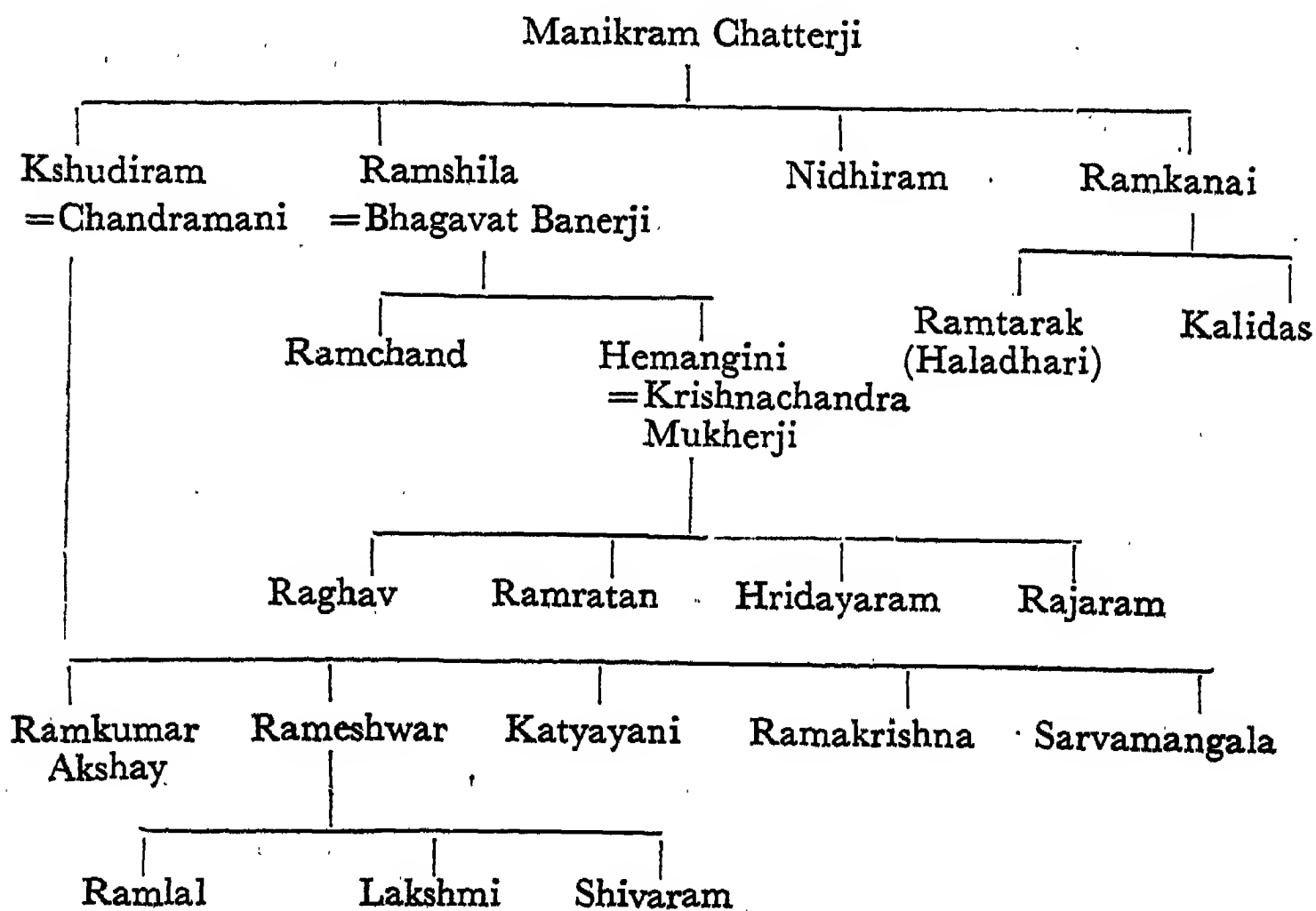
We have followed Saradamani Devi at Jayrambati up to her eleventh year. In the meantime an important event occurred to which we have now to revert.

Sri Ramakrishna's nephew Hridayaram Mukherji lived at Shihar, and the Master often went there. In the same village lived the maternal uncles of the Holy Mother. Besides, Shihar had the distinction of possessing a stone temple, built after old architectural patterns and dedicated to Siva under the name Shantinatha. The annual celebrations attracted the villagers from far and near who came to hear *kirtana* music or to witness open air country theatres called *yatra*. During one such *kirtana* at Hridaya's house a strange thing happened. Sarada Devi, then a mere child, sat in the lap of a woman who asked her in merriment, after the *kirtana*, 'Whom among the great number of people, assembled here, would you like to marry?' Sarada Devi at once lifted her two tiny hands and pointed to Sri Ramakrishna sitting not far away. At that time she had no idea of what matrimony was; but the unseen power that guided those little hands saw to the fulfilment of the wishes of that unerring heart.

The Mother had then completed her fifth year and entered the sixth; and there at Dakshineswar Sri Ramakrishna, then completing his twentythird year, was caught in the maelstrom of a spiritual fervour preparatory to the formulation and articulation of his special message for the age. Ignorant people then thought that he had been swept off his moorings and had lost his head. When exaggerated stories of his strange behaviour reached his mother Chandramani Devi at Kamarpukur, the venerable old lady who had hardly got over the shock of losing her eldest son Ramkumar,¹ had Ramakrishna brought home and

1. The Chatterjis of Kamarpukur.

had witch-doctors engaged for curing him of his malady. But although medicines and medicine-men failed, Sri Ramakrishna became a little composed owing perhaps to the repeated spiritual visions that were vouchsafed to him at this time. Chandramani Devi was a little reassured thereby; but along with others she diagnosed the cause of the disease to be his apathy to worldly matters. And so with the help of her elder son Rameshwar, she set about searching for a bride for him; but their efforts were of no avail. At last Sri Ramakrishna came to know of this and, strangely enough, he evinced no rebellious distemper, but rather said with boyish acquiescence and gaiety, 'Go and find the bride marked out with a straw¹ in Ramchandra Mukherji's house at Jayrambati.' Following this meaningful hint the bride was soon found out, and the wedding day was fixed for a suitable date in early May, 1859. On the appointed day Rameshwar went with his brother to Jayrambati and the marriage was duly celebrated.



1. A figure of speech from the rural custom of marking out a fruit for gods, or a seed by tying a straw round its stem.

With regard to her marriage¹ the Holy Mother said, 'I was married when the dates ripen. When I went to Kamarpukur within ten days, I picked up dates there. Dharmadas Laha (the landlord of the village) came and said, "Is this the newly married girl?" Surya's father (her uncle Iswar Mukherji) carried me to Kamarpukur in his arms.'

On the evening after the day of marriage, the groom's party returned to Kamarpukur with the married couple. When they reached there, Chandramani Devi welcomed them home with due ceremonies. The marriage celebration ended with some minor domestic observances and feeding of relatives as a matter of form, on a small scale, for, the poor Chatterjis could not afford to have anything big. Hardly were these over when a sad thought began to oppress Chandra Devi. The Chatterjis paid three hundred rupees as bridal money; moreover, decency and honour demanded that the bride should be duly adorned, for which purpose Chandra Devi took on loan some ornaments from the Lahas, the village landlords. These had now to be returned; and yet Chandra Devi could not think of depriving the person of such a lovable and guileless child as Sarada. Sri Ramakrishna understood his mother's difficulty and assured her that during the little wife's sleep, he would imperceptibly remove the ornaments. This he did so deftly that Sarada Devi could not perceive anything. But next morning when she found her body unadorned, she said pointing to her various limbs, 'Where are the ornaments gone that were here and here?' Chandra Devi was moved to tears by these simple words of the child, and placing her on her lap consoled her saying, 'My darling, Gadai (meaning Ramakrishna) will give you better ornaments in future.'

1. *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Punthi* (p. 554) relates, 'When women went round with twenty-seven burning sticks, the auspicious thread coloured with turmeric and tied round the Master's arm caught fire and was burnt away. The Master's acts were all inscrutable. Accepting his permanent Power (meaning the Holy Mother) he got his thread burnt by a trick, as it were.'

The girl was consoled somewhat by this, but her uncle who came the next day became infuriated and carried her back to Jayrambati.

This time Sri Ramakrishna stayed at home for more than two years. Some two years after his marriage, he once went to his father-in-law's house. About this visit the Mother said, 'When I was seven years old, the Master came to Jayrambati. You know that a married couple go together for a second time to the groom's house. He told me then, "If anyone asks you when you were married, say that you were married at the age of five. Don't say seven."' The Master perhaps warned her thus, lest she should think of this second visit together to Kamarpukur as the marriage itself. The Mother also remembered that the Master's nephew Hridaya, too, came with him and the latter searched out his little aunt and worshipped her feet despite her shyness. Sarada Devi's thoughts were still immature; and yet, without being instructed by anybody, she washed the Master's feet and fanned him, which added to the mirth of the people around. From Jayrambati the Master went to Kamarpukur with Sarada; and not long after, he returned to Dakshineswar to dive headlong into the sea of austerities for the realization of God. Sarada, too, came to Jayrambati and resumed her life under the tender care of her mother in the midst of rural beauty and simplicity.

Her third and fourth visits to Kamarpukur were when she was thirteen and fourteen years old. The Master was then at Dakshineswar, where also lived Chandra Devi, his mother. At Kamarpukur the Mother found Rameshwar and his wife and other relatives. Some five or six months intervened between these two visits. During the second visit she stayed at Kamarpukur for a month and a half. After that she spent about three or four months at Jayrambati till in 1867 news reached there that the Master had come home with Hridaya and Bhairavi Brahmani (the lady who guided him in his Tantrika spiritual practices), so that

it became necessary for her to go there. The Mother went and lived there with the Master for seven months.

This long stay amidst the quiet natural beauty and healthy surroundings of Kamarpukur improved the shattered health of the Master, and he returned to Dakshineswar with fresh vigour and drowned himself again in spiritual striving. When calm prevailed again, he resumed his visits to his native village, spending the rainy season there every year up till 1880, in accordance with the advice of physicians who condemned that season at Dakshineswar as too bad for his delicate health, undermined as it had been by long and strenuous disciplines. It is no longer possible to ascertain how many times the Mother went to Kamarpukur or what happened there during this long period from 1867 to 1880. Moreover, it is impossible to determine the exact dates of the few incidents that were related of this period by the Mother and others. Hence we shall relate some of these without any attempt at chronological sequence, and then we shall return to the anecdotes of the Bhairavi Brahmani.

The devotees heard from the Mother of a supernatural incident that happened to her when she was at Kamarpukur at the age of thirteen. Just behind the Master's house was a village road to which a backdoor opened for the use of women. Farther away lay the big Haldar-pukur (the tank of the Haldars) to which they went for bathing and for fetching water. The way lay across the village road and near some houses. In those days women, particularly young women of high caste families, were not allowed to move about freely, so that for the Mother who was shy by nature, it was a problem to traverse this distance alone. Stepping out of the backdoor she mused, 'I am a newly married young woman; how can I go alone for my bath?' As she stood perplexed, she saw eight girls approach her. So she stepped on to the road. Four of those girls walked in front of her, and four behind. Thus they all went to the tank and had their dip; and then they

returned in the same manner. This happened during the whole time that the Mother was there. The thought often crossed her mind, 'Who are these girls who come every day at the time of bath?' But she could not make out anything, nor did she ever ask them who they were.¹

We have already spoken of the Mother's keenness for study during the Jayrambati days, notwithstanding poverty and pressing duties. And we have to remember that in those days even well-to-do families did not think in terms of high academic attainments for their daughters. Sarada Devi's efforts thus bespeak of a wonderful enthusiasm for learning, which was kept up even in the more adverse circumstances while she was in her father-in-law's family. 'At Kamarpukur,' said the Holy Mother, 'Lakshmi² and myself used to read the first primer a little. Nephew Hridaya snatched away my book saying, "Women should not learn to read and write; will you ultimately turn to reading novels and dramas?"' Lakshmi did not part with her book, for being a daughter of the family she clung to it with determination. I secured another copy secretly for one anna. Lakshmi learnt her lessons at the village school and then taught me.' In passing, we may refer to the Mother's reminiscence to show that this ardour lasted even into her youth. 'I got real education,' said she, 'at Dakshineswar. The Master was then at Shyampukur for treatment; and I was absolutely alone. A girl of the family of Bhava Mukherji came to bathe there. She stayed long and often with me. Every day as she came for bath, she imparted lessons and tested me at them.'³ I gave her plenty of greens,

1. The Hindu belief is that the Mother of the Universe has eight maids on attendance.

2. The Mother was older by about ten years than Lakshmi Devi, her niece (daughter of Rameshwar Chatterji).

3. From an account in *Shri Shri Lakshmimani* it appears that at the Master's instance, a boy named Pitambar Bhandari, who was of eleven or twelve years of age, taught Lakshmi Devi and her aunt, the first and second primers, after which the lessons stopped, as that would be enough for enabling them to read the sacred epics like the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. In the recorded talks of the Mother we have no reference to this.

vegetables, etc., which came here to me from the (temple) garden.' As a result of this education the Mother could read such books as the *Ramayana* (Story of Rama), but she could not write much; and at the end of her life she could not even sign her name. In later days a disciple wanted to have an autograph from her, and she agreed to it in a way. But in a vain attempt to sign her name she scrawled and scrawled, and then, failing to produce anything readable, gave up the attempt.

In all references in her talks to the Kamarpukur family there was a genuine ring of love and respect for her mother-in-law and father-in-law. With regard to the latter she said with pride, 'The father-in-law, I had, was a spirited and orthodox Brahmin. He would not accept gifts indiscriminately. There was a standing order to refuse anything even though it might be brought to the house. As for my mother-in-law, however, if anybody brought anything to her secretly, she would accept it and then cook and offer it to Raghuvira (Ramachandra, the family deity), and distribute the *prasada* (sanctified food) to all. My father-in-law became very angry if he happened to learn of it. But he had a fiery devotion. Mother Shitala (another family deity) ever moved with him. He used to go out plucking flowers long before the day dawned. One day, as he entered the garden of the Lahas, a girl of nine said, "Father, come this side; the branch this side has plenty of flowers. Well, I shall hold it down and you shall pluck them." He inquired, "Who are you, my child, here at this time?" And she replied, "It is I, I of this Haldar house." It is just because he was of this nature that God (the Master) was born in his house.' Sarada Devi served her mother-in-law like a dutiful daughter, and during that service learnt many anecdotes of the Chatterji family, as also about its various ups and downs. Thus equipped, she contrasted one day the orthodoxy of her father-in-law, of which she came to know when rubbing oil on the back of her mother-in-law, with the liberality of the Master and

remarked with a smile, 'The Master was born in such a strict family, and yet he became the priest of a Kaivarta¹ (i.e. Rani Rasmani)!'

During the stay at Kamarpukur, the Mother made perfect what she had learnt earlier about swimming, singing, sewing, embroidery, and cooking. Village girls in those days did not get any training either in these and allied arts, or in cultural subjects in general. They picked up what they could by themselves, and the social set-up was eminently fitted for such self-education. There were the Bauls (a class of mendicants) and beggars who sang from door to door many songs of the highest religious import, and dramas on mythological subjects were frequently staged, through which rural people had their spiritual edification and temporal enlightenment. Many such factors contributed to the early education of the Mother. But the finishing touches came from the Master himself. Her talks with the disciples in later days bore the unmistakable imprint of such a simple but efficient training and the contact of a great personality during the most impressionable and formative period of her life.

When the Mother came to Kamarpukur, the Master began teaching her many things—both temporal and spiritual. He first conquered the heart of the girl through love and then poured into it all that he had learnt through long experience. On the one hand he held before her an integrated life made impeccable through the influence of the renunciation of all thoughts of enjoyment, and he trained her step by step in reaching that glorious pinnacle through a steady moulding of character and heightening of aspiration; and on the other hand he taught her how to perform the daily duties, to serve the deities, the Brahmins, and the guests, to be respectful to superiors, affectionate to the younger members of the family, and in everyway serviceable to the family as

1. Strictly speaking, Rasmani was not a Kaivarta, but belonged to the higher caste of Mahishya, though neither caste could ordinarily expect to have the aristocratic Chatterjis as its temple priests.

a whole. And by basing his instruction on the common sense view of adaptability according to time, place, and person, he taught her how to deal with others, whether within the family or outside it, how to be careful when getting into or out of a conveyance so that nothing might be left behind; and even such petty matters as trimming lamps, spicing curries, preparing betel rolls, were not left out of that comprehensive and wonderful curriculum. The feeling of elation that Sarada Devi, simple, pure, spiritually-minded and full of faith as she was, felt from those delightfully instructive contacts which were full of zest and yet free from all selfishness and passion, can be better understood from what she once told some woman devotees: "From that time onward, I always felt as if a pitcher of bliss was kept in my heart. I cannot convey any idea of how much and in what manner my mind feasted on that steady, unchanging divine joy."

Lakshmi Devi once drew before a monk a picture in these words of how the ever-joyful Master taught the Mother: "The Master always alluded to the unreality of the world and its troubles and tribulations, and told the Mother, "Detachment and devotion are the only things that matter." He said, "What would one gain by bearing children, like bitches and vixens?" The Holy Mother's mother had many children, some of whom had died. The Mother had brought them up in her lap and had witnessed her parents lamenting the death of some of them; she too had had her share of the sorrow. The Master drew attention to all these and said, "You too have had much first-hand experience, and you must have realized how painful it all is. Why all this fuss? Without all that, you are your own mistress and will ever remain so." The Mother was ever busy at work. One morning she was bedaubing the ground inside, with a paste of mud and cowdung,¹ and the

1. A practice common in villages where they do not have cemented floors and courtyards. Every morning the housewives mix earth and cowdung in water and then overlay the ground with the paste with the help of a handful of rags.

Master was cutting jokes while brushing his teeth with a twig. To the Mother he said, "You may dance and sing bedecking yourself with ornaments at the first rice-eating ceremony of your son but you will writhe in agony when the son dies." The Mother, had been listening to the talk in silence; but when the Master went on alluding repeatedly to the death of sons, she at last blurted out in a low tone, "Will all of them really die?" Hardly had the words escaped her mouth when the Master said loudly, "Ah me! Here indeed I have trampled on the tail of a deadly snake.¹ Dear me! I thought she was good-natured, and innocent of everything, but she seems to know a lot! How she says, 'Will all of them really die?' " The Mother left the place in a hurry.

Being free from the constrained manners and artificial courtesies of urban society, the Master felt a spontaneous ease at Kamarpukur and moved freely with people. One day the Mother wanted to go with another lady of the house to an open air religious drama (*yatra*) which was being staged in a neighbouring village. The Master did not like the idea; but then realizing that they were feeling disappointed, he enacted the whole drama before them without anybody else's help. He had seen it only once; but so sharp was his memory, so realistic his histrionics, and so sweet his music, that the ladies soon got over their sorrow and sat spell-bound for a long time, as though they were witnessing the real performance.

About the Master's disposition at Kamarpukur, the Holy Mother said, 'I never saw him morose. He rejoiced in everybody's company—be he a boy or an old man. Certainly, my dear, I never found him gloomy. Ah! At Kamarpukur he would say after leaving his bed every day, "I shall have this green today for my meal, please cook that." Overhearing him, we (i.e., Holy Mother and Lakshmi Devi's mother) would get together some greens and cook

1. A venomous snake reacts furiously when trampled on, whereas a non-venomous one tries rather to escape.

them. Sometime later he said, "Bah! what has happened to me? From early morning I think of eating only! Fie on this!" And to me he said, "I have no more desire for any particular dish, I shall eat whatever you cook and whatever you offer." He used to go to the country for recouping his health; for he suffered very much from digestive troubles at Dakshineswar and said, "Pooh! The stomach is a store of filth which keeps on flowing out!" All this made the body repugnant to him, and he took no further care of it.'

The Master was very fond of cutting jokes. One of his jokes is particularly enjoyable. 'Lakshmi's mother and I,' said the Mother, 'cooked at Kamarpukur. One day the Master and Hridaya sat for meal. Lakshmi's mother was a good cook. Tasting the dish that she had prepared, the Master said, "O Hridaya, it is the Vaidya Ramdas who has cooked this." And tasting the dish that I had cooked, he ejaculated, "And this has been cooked by Shrinath Sen." Lakshmi's mother was Ramdas Vaidya, and I Shrinath Sen—a quack. At this Hridaya added, "That is true; but your quack will be ever ready—even for massaging. She has only to be sent for. As for Ramdas Vaidya, his fees are high, you cannot have him at all times. Moreover, people call in the quack first,—he is ever at your service." The Master said, "It's true, it's true. She is ever there."'

The Master had a curious boyish liking for seasoning spices. One day, he ordered his niece Lakshmi Devi, 'Lakshmi, buy an anna worth of flavouring spices.' And to the Mother he said, 'Cook a soup of mixed lentils and season it with the spices in such a way that the sound will be like the grunting of a pig.'¹ Another day he heard Lakshmi Devi's mother directing the Holy Mother, saying

1. Cumin (jira), aniseed (mauri), fenugreek (methi), black cumin (Kala jira), and caraway (randhuni) are singed in oil or clarified butter (ghee); and then the cooked curry or soup is poured on the spices while the pan is still on fire, the reaction being a great sound which can be heard from afar.

that as the store was empty of seasoning spices, the cooking was to be done without them. Overhearing this the Master cried out, "How is that, my dear! If the spices have run short why don't you get a pice worth of them? It won't do to eliminate any ingredient from anything. It was for the smell of your seasoning spices that I left my delicious dishes at Dakshineswar and came here; and you now want to deprive me of this!" Put to shame, Lakshmi's mother at once ordered the spices.'

In 1867, after a long spiritual discipline Sri Ramakrishna came to Kamarpukur and the Holy Mother too came there. Though he had been formally initiated into Sannyasa, his teacher Totapuri had told him, 'That man is really established in Brahman whose self-abnegation, detachment, discrimination, and realization remain fully unaffected even in the presence of his wife. He is a true knower of Brahman who can ever look upon both men and women as the Self and deal with them accordingly. Those who are conscious of the difference between the sexes may be treading the path of realization, but are as yet far removed from the goal.' Totapuri, who was a seer himself, added that if a man of the highest realization like Sri Ramakrishna performed his duty towards his wife without any mental deflection, he lost no spiritual value thereby and incurred no demerit. So one can easily understand why a simple, truthful, and bold experimenter in the spiritual field like Sri Ramakrishna accepted his wife with all love when she came to Kamarpukur; and yet this intimacy never affected his mind in the least. But this affected the Bhairavi Brahmani very adversely.

Her first reaction to the Mother's coming was one of love. The Mother was very young then, and respected the Bhairavi as much as she did her mother-in-law, though fear had, perhaps, something to do in the matter. The Bhairavi who hailed from East Bengal, would use chillies abundantly in the curries, as was the habit in those parts, and she would offer these to Lakshmi Devi's mother and the Holy Mother

and await their reaction. The former would say bluntly, 'Forsooth! how terribly hot it is!' But the Mother, afraid of the Bhairavi's anger, would say, 'Good indeed!'—while tears trickled down from her eyes. Unmindful of these the Bhairavi would say to Lakshmi Devi's mother, 'But my daughter-in-law (Holy Mother) here says that it is very savoury. To you, my dear, nothing is good. I shall never again give you any curry.'—The Mother used often to relate the story with a hearty laugh. The Bhairavi one day decorated the Master like Sri Gauranga¹ with garlands and called in the Mother to see how charming he looked. The Mother, when she came, found him in a state of divine inebriation which frightened her a little, but when the Brahmani asked, 'How does he look?' she replied, 'Fine,' and left after a hurried prostration. Perhaps, she was both shy and nervous; for we have to remember that the Holy Mother was still a veiled maiden who could not yet afford to be bold in her relation with her husband in the presence of an elderly lady like the Bhairavi Brahmani; besides, the Mother who was naturally modest entirely lacked such frivolity.

Though the Mother had no lack of awe and reverence for the Bhairavi, the latter still became jealous because of the Master's free association with her. Quite a number of families there are which are made unhappy by this unnatural relation between the mother-in-law and the daughter-in-law. Be that as it may, the Bhairavi, finding no occasion to have a fling at the Mother, gave vent to her jealousy in other ways. She became apprehensive of Sri Ramakrishna's future and warned him that by freely mixing with his wife he was but jeopardizing his spiritual welfare. A man of realization like Totapuri could see no harm in the free play of the blazing fire of Sri Ramakrishna's pure heart; but blinded by her love, the Bhairavi wanted to keep it under her fostering care, not knowing that she would

1. A 15th century Bengal saint, noted for his unique 'ecstatic love of God and venerated as an Incarnation.

herself get burnt in the process. She refused to realize that the scene was rapidly changing; the little Sarada was steadily but surely coming to the front to take her place as the inheritor of Sri Ramakrishna's spiritual achievements and the propagator of the glory of motherhood in the world. Sri Ramakrishna, too, fully aware of her life's mission, was preparing her accordingly. Failing to grasp the divine plan behind it all, the Bhairavi ran counter to them, thereby heaping miseries on herself and making life intolerable for all. The truth, however, dawned on her at last, and finding herself in the wrong, she confessed this to Sri Ramakrishna, took leave of him, and went away to Banaras. She was henceforth totally blotted out of the Mother's life.

After the departure of the Bhairavi Brahmani, Sri Ramakrishna returned to Dakshineswar and the Holy Mother after a long period of seven months of unalloyed joy, went back to her mother at Jayrambati (November, 1867). 'We can well understand that henceforward there came a change in her bearing, in her talk and general conduct, etc. But it is doubtful if this was noticed by the ordinary people, for this made her quiet rather than flaunty, introspective rather than obstreperous, and selflessly loving rather than self-centred; and through creating a feeling of unruffled contentment under all circumstances it made her sympathize with people in their trials and tribulations. It thus transformed her into a veritable embodiment of kindness' (*Lilaprasanga, Sadhaka-bhava*. pp. 343-44).

THE GREAT AWAKENING

Arrived at Jayrambati, the Mother found the village still the charming old place she had known it to be; the love and affection of parents, brothers, and cousins, and, in fact, of all relatives were as deep as ever; the daily life with its work and recreation, talks and discussions, still flowed on as before; yet in the depths of her heart could be felt the stirring of some muffled sorrow. At Kamarpukur she enjoyed a divine bliss, the memory of which remained for ever fresh in her mind; but finding nothing corresponding to it in the outside world, she turned inward with disappointment, converting life into a brooding, wailing dream. Autumn was followed by early winter, and then came chilly days. But for ever the Holy Mother kept her ears pricked up for any chance news trickling into this village despite the barriers of transmission and rural indifference. Thus passed four long years.

In the meantime some stray pieces of news broke into the quiet sublimity of Jayrambati and stimulated gossip. The villagers concluded from what they had heard that Sri Ramakrishna had lost his mental balance. The Mother had now neither zest in work nor solace in imagination; she only went about her daily round of duties mechanically. The ever-present pang of separation from the Master gnawed at her heart and cast a gloom over her face which drew the instinctive sympathy of the village women. But they, however, owing to their ignorance or narrow outlook, talked in a way that intensified rather than assuaged her agony. Their companionship became intolerable rather than welcome. Though they seemed to share her sorrow, they really pointed to her husband as an object of ridicule. And quite a few said pointing to her, 'That's the wife of a madman,' or under the guise of consoling her, inflicted on her a cruel wound by saying, 'Ah me! Shyama's daughter has been married to a

lunatic.' Loathing such company, the Mother avoided visiting any house and kept herself constantly engrossed in work. To a loving, faithful wife, any criticism of her husband is intolerable. She kept to her home all the time. And when this became oppressively monotonous, she would go to aunt Bhanu's¹ house and there on a verandah she would spread out her cloth and lie down.

The pure-hearted aunt Bhanu had an insight by which she got a glimpse of Sri Ramakrishna's hidden greatness. She said to Shyamasundari Devi, 'Well, sister-in-law, your son-in-law is Siva,—none other than Krishna Himself. I prophesy that in future you will believe what you don't now.' When the Master came to Jayrambati for the second time to take his girl-wife to Kamarpukur, aunt Bhanu reminded of the divine couple Siva and Parvati, sang merrily, 'As thou art beautiful, my little child (Sarada) hast thou got a groom who is both mad and naked.' We have to remember that in those days the Mother's complexion was bright and fair. Aunt Bhanu recognised even in those early days, and in her own way, the Master and the Mother as Siva and His consort. But people regarded her as too emotional in her nature, and nobody heeded her. Her house was the only place where the Mother got shelter and mental composure.

But obviously 'a whole life could not be spent thus. True it was that she did not believe in all the gossip that was going on about the Master. For, it was incredible that the Master could be mad,—he whose holy company had conferred on her immeasurable bliss only the other day, whose divine fervour infected her also to some extent and brought about an indescribable elation in her, whose

1. Aunt Bhanu or Bhanu-pisi was born at Shihar and married in a Ghosh (cowherd) family at Jayrambati. The Mukherjis were their priests at Jayrambati and the Mazumdars, of her father's family at Shihar. Pisi means father's sister, and though this non-Brahmin woman could have no family ties with the Mother, this relationship was established between them according to rural custom. The Master also called her Bhanu-pisi.

selfless thought for others had charmed her, and whose wise discourse and witty remarks held all spell-bound for hours. But, all the same, the ignorant village people could not evaluate his afflatus; and so their unbridled imagination raced apace, and their criticism was unchecked. The dutiful wife, therefore, came to think at last, 'When all people talk thus, let me once go and see him.' At the beginning of 1872, many people of the neighbourhood were going to Calcutta for bathing in the Ganges on an auspicious day¹ which was near at hand. The Mother wanted to accompany them, and yet through fear and bashfulness she could not speak out. At last no longer able to suppress her idea, she divulged it to a woman who communicated everything to Ramchandra. The old noble-hearted father took it in the best of spirits and said, 'Does she want to go? Very good.' And he himself escorted her.

Along with other pilgrims the father and the daughter had to travel about sixty miles on foot. On either side of the track there were open fields covered here and there with green crops and dotted now and then by villages shaded by clusters of trees. They came by big tanks with sparkling water, and now and again they took rest under huge shady trees. Some two or three days thus passed uneventfully. The Mother was full of enthusiasm for reaching Dakshineswar soon, but unfortunately her health was not equal to the task. That part of the country was infested with malaria from which she had often suffered.

1. The *Lila-prasanga* takes this to be Dola-purnima which fell on 25th March, 1872. But it might have been the Chaitra-samkranti day which is widely observed as an occasion for holy bath. The Mother never spoke of Dola-purnima, but vaguely referred to 'some sacred day.' She also said, 'The Master worshipped me as Shodashi a month and a half after my arrival there.' If Dola-purnima is accepted as the auspicious day in question, the period intervening between the Mother's arrival and the Shodashi worship would be two and a half months instead of one and a half. The Mother was not likely to forget such an important event in her life. In this, as also in subsequent narratives, we take her version as the most authoritative.

Besides, she was not used to making such long journeys. But, for fear of causing her father and others anxiety and inconvenience, she kept quiet about her growing indisposition for two or three days. At last, she had fever and the temperature rose so high that it was impossible for her to proceed. Ramchandra took shelter with her in a nearby hut. It can well be imagined how great was the Mother's disappointment. Fever was nothing new to her; so she had no worry on that score. Neither had this unknown place any terrors for her. But what caused her the greatest dismay was the delay interposed by all these events in meeting the Master for whom she had been pining away.

A divine vision came to her in this hour of dejection, and cheered her up. As the Mother lay unconscious on the bed, she saw a dark woman of peerless beauty sitting by her caressing the Mother's head and body with her soft, cool hands. It seemed to remove all her pain. The Mother asked, 'Where do you come from, my dear?' The stranger replied, 'I come from Dakshineswar.' The Mother wondered at this and said, 'From Dakshineswar! I thought I would go there, see him, and serve him. But as I am laid down with fever on the way, I fear this may never come to pass.' The dark woman said, 'Don't you worry! You will certainly go to Dakshineswar; you will recover soon and see him. It is for you that I have been holding him there.' The Mother said, 'Indeed! How are you related to us, my dear?' The woman said, 'I am your sister.' The Mother said, 'Indeed! That's why you have come!' After this conversation the Mother fell asleep.¹

1. On another occasion the Mother related the incident thus: 'Once, when on my way to Dakshineswar in my early years, I had fever. I lay unconscious, when I saw a dark-complexioned girl with dusty feet sitting by my bed-side and stroking my head. Seeing her feet full of dust I asked, "Dear child, did not anybody offer you water for washing your feet?" She replied, "No, mother, I shall leave forthwith. I came to see you. Don't be afraid, you will recover." And truly, I did recover gradually from the very next day.'

Next morning she found that the fever was off, and that the divine vision had put fresh zeal and vigour into her. Hence when her father suggested that instead of waiting helplessly in that unknown place it were better to proceed slowly, the Mother readily agreed. Then they moved on. Fortunately, a palanquin was available nearby. She had fever on the way again, but it was not very severe. Besides, she was not then as helpless as before. So she kept quiet without adding to the worry of her father by telling him of her predicament. Slowly, the long journey ended, and by crossing the Ganges, they reached Dakshineswar at nine o'clock in the night.

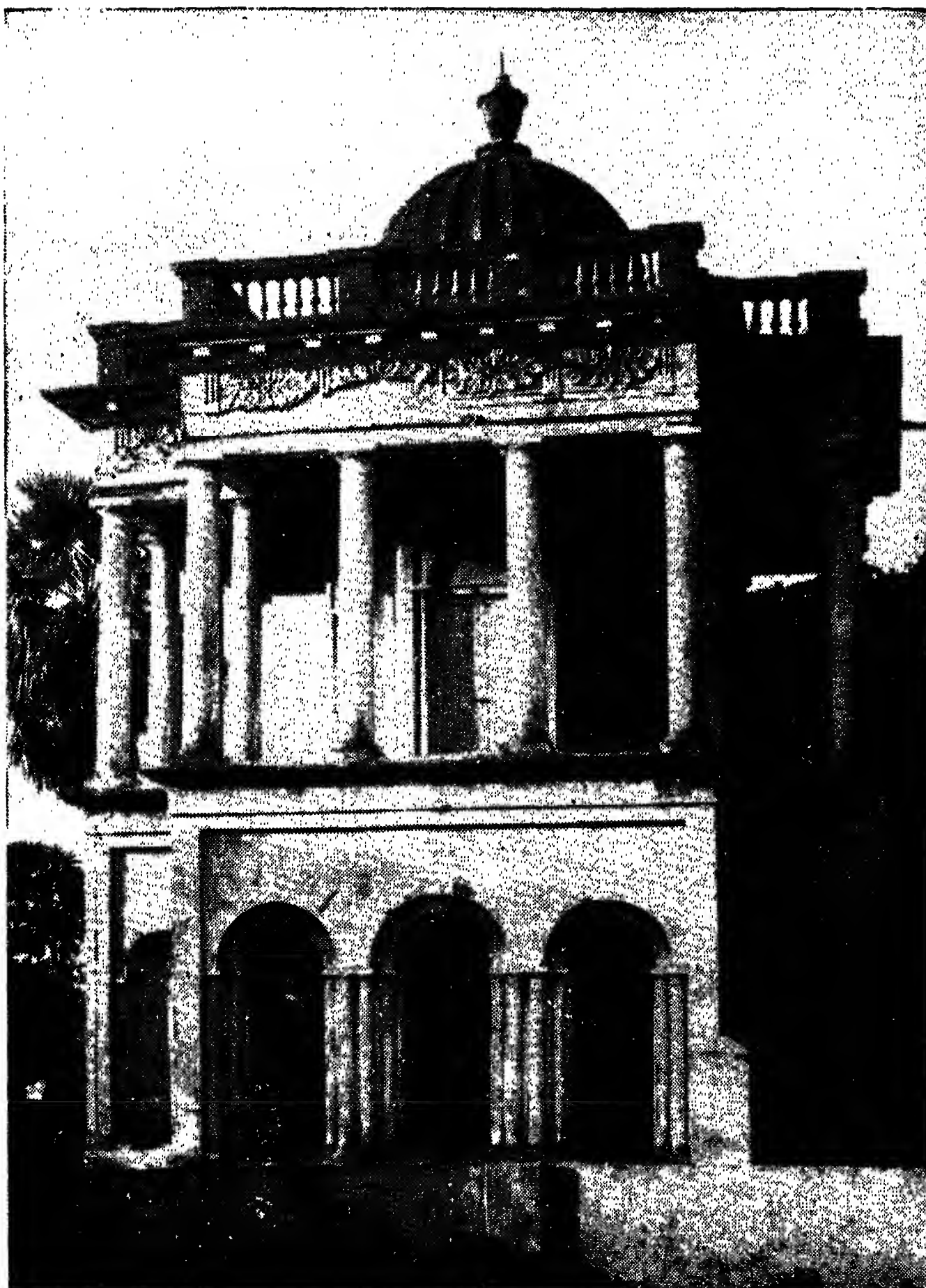
As the people from Jayrambati were landing from the boat, the Mother heard the Master saying, 'O Hride(Hridaya), I hope the time is not inauspicious. This is her first visit.' The Mother had no worry on that score as she knew that she had passed the inauspicious time in the boat itself. That apart, those few words of the Master had such a touch of sincere love in them that, moved by them, she went straight to his room, while others went to the Nahabat (i.e., the orchestra block or the concert house)¹ or other places. As soon as he saw her, the Master said, 'Ah! You are here at last! That's well done.' Then he ordered some one nearby, 'Spread a mat for her.' A mat was spread on the floor of the room. The Mother sat on it and talked with the Master. When the latter learnt that she was ill, he became very anxious about her treatment and comfort and said with extreme regret, 'Alas! You have come so late! Would that my Mathur were there now to serve you! My right arm is broken now, as it were.' Mathur who was the son-in-law of Rani Rasmani, the

1. There are two detached two-storeyed structures on the Ganges on either side of the main temple compound. They were originally meant to be used for playing temple music at stated hours, particularly, early morning and evening. We are concerned only with the northern one, which does not seem to have been used for this purpose. The Master's mother Chandra Devi first used the upper storey as a dwelling room. Later the Holy Mother took up residence on the ground floor.

foundress of the Dakshineswar temple, and who was the first supplier of the Master's needs, had died only a few months before (16th July, 1871).

After the first greetings, the Mother wanted to go to the Nahabat. But the Master said, 'No, no, it will be difficult to arrange for treatment there; you stay here in this room.' So a separate bed was spread for her; and it was arranged that a woman companion of the Mother would also sleep with her. The temple staff had just then finished their meals, leaving no surplus. Hridaya, however, brought some fried-rice for the two. Next day, at the Master's instance, a physician was called in. Through proper care the Mother came round in three or four days, after which she went to live in the Nahabat, where her mother-in-law lived. When the old lady came to Dakshineswar, a room in the building where the proprietors of the temple lived was allotted to her. But a few months before the demise of Mathur, Akshay, a nephew of the Master, died in that room; and as Chandra Devi did not like to live there in the midst of old painful associations, she shifted on to the Nahabat, saying, 'I won't live there any longer. I shall stay in this Nahabat-room, and shall keep my eyes fixed on the Ganges. I have no need of that bungalow any more.'

Any suspicion that might still be lingering in the Mother's heart about the Master's mental aberration and apathy towards her, was set at nought by direct communication. What exaggerated tales had indeed been circulated among the ignorant villagers! There a god had been equated with a lunatic! And not only so, the gossips had been persistent and vigorous enough to impart even to such a faithful heart as the Mother's a slight touch of doubt! But now she saw that her god was just as he had been. Far from forgetting his wife, he seemed to be even more concerned about her. So it did not take her long to decide; she stayed on at the Nahabat serving both him and his mother out of the fullness of her heart. Her father also,



THE NAHABAT

being reassured by the Master's love for his daughter and respect for himself, returned home cheerfully.

Taking his cue from the words of his guru Totapuri, the Master, while at Kamarpukur, had proceeded to test the strength and genuineness of his knowledge and to fulfil his duty towards his wife. After that his mind had been engaged for four years in visiting places of pilgrimage and undergoing austerity. Now, finding his wife again by his side through some divine dispensation, he resumed both the unfinished tasks. But in this he was not guided by the requirements of any commonplace conjugal relationship. He rather took his stand on the spiritual relationship subsisting between the teacher and his disciple or that between the Universal Mother and Her votary, and thereby he brought down to the world a new value by assimilating which humanity could move higher up. All this we write by way of introduction to the worship of the Mother in the form of goddess Shodashi. But before we actually come to that important event, we shall do well to understand more fully the mutual esteem which inspired the conjugal life of this unique couple.

During this time, the Master instructed his wife about everything ranging from such worldly affairs as domestic duties, dealing with relatives, good manners, and the need for adaptability under varying conditions, to spiritual practices like religious music, meditation, service, and self-abnegation. From her talks with him the Mother formed a clear conception of the aim and purpose of human life. For instance, the Master one day told her, 'Just as the moon is equally lovable to all, so also is God the nearest one to all. Everyone has an equal right to call on Him. If you invoke Him, you too will see Him.' And he did not stop with such instruction; he saw to its fulfilment in the everyday conduct of the Mother. The Mother spent the day at the Nahabat attending to her duties; but at night she had the Master's permission to share his bed with him. During one of these intimate moments, the Master, by way

of examining her, suddenly asked, 'Well, my dear, have you come to drag me down to the worldly level?' The Mother replied without a moment's hesitation, 'No. Why should I drag you to worldly ways? I have come to help you in your chosen path.' The Mother, too, while massaging his feet one night asked, 'How do you regard me?' The Master said in reply, 'The same Mother that is in the (Kali) temple, gave birth to this body and now resides at the Nahabat, and she, again, is now massaging my feet. Truly do I see you as a veritable form of the Blissful Mother!' The reader now can very well realize what supernormal characters we have undertaken to paint, and how hard the task is. If we are to follow these holy lives with an amount of understanding, transcending as they did all sensual relationships and carnal contacts, we on our part must for a while free our minds from worldly preconceptions and concentrate on eternal verities.

The Mother, for aught we know, slept every night with the Master. But this was no ordinary matrimonial love. The Master was then in the full vigour of his manhood and the Mother in the prime of her youth. The fiery ordeal that they now undertook, or rather the drama that they were now to enact for the edification of the world throws into the shade the hardest trial recorded in history. The Master, free from all sense of body-consciousness, spent the whole night in a state of divine afflatus. During one of the intervals between such moods of ecstasy he looked at the youthful, charming person of the Mother lying asleep by his side, and he engaged himself in a self-examination thus: 'O mind, this is what is called a female form. People think of this as a thing of supreme enjoyment and wistfully run after it. But if this is accepted, one becomes enmeshed in body-consciousness and cannot attain God who is Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute. Don't be insincere to yourself: don't have a hidden hankering and yet make false profession. Tell me truly, do you want this or God? If you want this, then here it is before you; take

it.' With such self-inquiry no sooner did he stretch his hand to touch her body than his mind suddenly recoiled and got lost in the higher reaches of ecstasy; it never returned to the ordinary plane that night. Next day it was possible to bring his mind down only after repeating the Lord's name for a pretty long time.

The Mother slept with the Master continuously for eight months. During this long period not only did the Master's mind soar high, but the Mother's also was lost in thinking of eternal verities. So there was no occasion for physical hankering on either side. The Master was so deeply impressed by the immaculate purity of the Mother's character that in later days he bore witness to it in these words: 'If she had not been as pure as she really was, if she had lost self-control and seduced me, then who can say if I too might not have lost self-control and come down to the physical plane? After my marriage I prayed earnestly to the Mother (of the Universe), "Mother, do please totally eradicate all passion from my wife." Living with her at this time I realized that the Mother (of the Universe) had really responded to my importunity.'

Whatever the Master might have said by way of a lesson to others, we know for certain that there was no possibility of Sri Ramakrishna's succumbing to feminine fascination. For, had he not fully established himself in transcendental poise after being freed from earthly cravings? And what need could there be of any solicitude for the purity of the Holy Mother who was purity itself? But there is some meaning in all this when we look at it as a deliberate attempt at setting up a model; and then also the need for a public declaration of a secret truth becomes comprehensible. For only the husband and the wife know each other thoroughly; and so from the worldly point of view a certain intrinsic value attaches to the evidence of each for the other.

Although the mutual relationship of the Master and the Mother found expression in various ways, it reached its

acme in the Shodashi¹ worship. This is not the occasion for understanding the mystic import of this rite from the Master's angle of vision. Our endeavour will be to study its implication from the Mother's side.

The Master had accepted the little Sarada as his wife and given her a foretaste of divine love at Kamarpukur; and at Kamarpukur and Dakshineswar he had equipped her mind for domestic as well as divine life. Now was the time for awakening and making active the divine in the woman. Moreover, on the Master's part, there was need for raising her in the estimation of the world by offering his own sincerest worship, so that she might naturally take up the threads of his unfinished task after him; and it was necessary, too, to make that deity conscious of her real stature. That was the meaning of this worship.

After the Master had been assured of Sarada Devi's purity by living with her for a month and a half, he proceeded to offer her his heart's adoration. The new-moon night of 5th June, 1872, was the auspicious time for the worship of Kali in her aspect as Phalaharini (destroyer of the effects of past deeds). In Sri Ramakrishna's mind grew the desire of worshipping that night the Mother of the Universe as Shodashi.² The worship was not

1. Shodashi is the Mother of the Universe in the form of a most beautiful woman in the prime of her youth, exquisitely attired, and seated on a throne. She is otherwise known as Tripura-sundari or Sri-vidya. In this instance the Master accepted the Holy Mother as a symbol for the deity, to start with, and ultimately established her identity with the deity. This worship of the Mother in human form is sanctioned by the scriptures, though the usual symbols are pictures, pitchers, earthen images, *yantras* (ritualistic drawings), etc.

2. The *Lila-prasanga*, *Sadhaka-bhava* (pp. 353-54) fixes the date for this ceremony as the 25th May, 1873 or more than a year after the Mother's arrival at Dakshineswar. The Mother herself put this as one month and a half (*vide* foot-note on p. 41); and in *Sri Ramakrishna Deva*, a biography of the Master by his direct disciple, Shashibhushan Ghosh, we read that the worship was performed 'within three months of Sri Sarada Devi's reaching Dakshineswar' (p. 331). The Mother also says that she returned to Jayrambati one year after the worship (*Sri Sri Mayer Katha*, II, 130).

to be performed in public, but secretly in the Master's room according to his own wishes. The Master usually relied on Hridaya for such odd jobs. But that night, Hridaya had to perform the special worship at the Kali temple; and he left for the temple after doing what little he could. Then Dinu,¹ the other priest, came to the Master's help after finishing his daily task at the Vishnu temple. All the accessories of the worship were now duly arranged; and there was in front of the Master an artistically decorated low wooden seat for the deity, though no image had been brought. At last when everything was in order, priest Dinu left the place at nine o'clock.

The Master had asked the Mother to be present at the worship; now she entered the room and looked on intently as the worship proceeded. The Master sat near the western door-way facing eastward. With the chanting of appropriate *mantras* he sanctified the accessories of the worship and after finishing the preliminaries, he beckoned the Mother to the decorated seat. The Mother had become semi-conscious through spiritual fervour as she had been watching the worship, and now not knowing what or why she was doing, she moved forward as though under a charm and sat on the allotted low stool facing the Master. The Master took some sanctified water from the pitcher and sprinkled it on her body. Then, after uttering the *mantras* appropriate to the occasion, he prayed to her, 'O Thou eternal Virgin, Thou Mother Tripura-sundari, the Source of all power, do Thou open the gates of perfection. Sanctifying her mind and body, do Thou manifest Thyself through her (the Holy Mother) and ordain all good.' Then he mentally identified the different limbs of the Holy Mother with the corresponding parts of the Deity with appropriate sacred formulae (*mantras*), and considering her as none other than the Deity Herself, worshipped her duly with the usual sixteen kinds of

1. He belonged to Mukundapur and was the son of a cousin of the Master.

offering. At last the votary took up some sweets in hand and put them in the mouth of the Deity. By and by, the Mother lost all outer consciousness and the worshipper, too, as he proceeded with his ceremonies, gradually lost himself in beatitude. On that level of ecstasy the Deity and the devotee became identified. In this way hours passed; and when midnight was long over, there were signs of the Master's recovery from his absorption. As soon as he regained sufficient consciousness, he offered himself to the Deity; and then laying himself, the fruits of all his disciplines, and his rosary at the feet of the Goddess, he uttered the salutation: 'O Thou, the most auspicious goodness among all auspicious things, the fulfiller of all aims, the refuge of all, Thou the three-eyed, golden hued consort of Siva, Thou the power of Narayana, I salute thee.' The worship was over; and this adoration in a human figure of the Divine Mother who is the source of all enlightenment, ended the long course of austerity that the Master had undertaken. And for the Holy Mother too, was opened the door leading to the highest achievement that humanity conjoined with divinity can attain. After the worship she returned to the normal plane and saluting the Master left for the Nahabat.

The Mother had then completed the eighteenth year of her age and entered the nineteenth, though by mistake she often said, 'I had then commenced my sixteenth year.' We now put in brief the other details of this incident that the curious women devotees gathered from the Mother. When the Mother said that at the commencement of the ceremony, the Master painted her feet with liquid lac-dye, put vermilion on her forehead, clad her with a new piece of cloth, and put betel and sweets into her mouth, Lakshmi Devi asked with an amused smile, 'You are so shy, my dear, how did he put clothes on you?' The Mother simply replied, 'I was not quite myself then.' The Mother sat facing the jar of Ganges water which used to be kept at the north-west corner of the room and to her

right were the materials for the worship. A night-long festivity was going on outside, and nobody knew what was happening within the closed room, nor did noise from outside reach them. There were only two persons sitting facing each other—the Master and the Mother. Towards the end Hridaya came in. After the adoration, the Mother was faced with a problem,—what was she to do with the conch bangles, cloth, etc., which she had received as offerings. She referred the matter to the Master, who after a little reflection said, ‘Well, you can give them to your mother; but mind you, when making them over, do not think of her as a mortal, but rather as the Universal Mother.’ The Holy Mother did accordingly.

In a state of divine afflatus the Mother accepted the worship as also the result of all the spiritual disciplines of the Master. In fact, she inherited the richest spiritual wealth without any corresponding conscious endeavour on her part; and in addition, she learnt how to look upon all beings as manifestations of the Universal Mother. The Master, too, felt himself quite at ease after discharging the highest duty to his partner in life.

The Mother continued to share the Master’s room for about six months more even after this ceremony. This was not for her, however, an unmixed boon; for not being fully familiar with the divine moods of this unique personality who constantly got lost in trances and raptures, she off and on spent sleepless nights sitting by him and anxiously watching the startling, unfamiliar, physical changes. ‘Words can’t describe,’ she said, ‘the spiritual states in which the Master remained merged. Often in his divine ecstasy he would be talking of many things; sometimes he would laugh and sometimes weep, and sometimes he would be totally lost in trances. This went on for the whole night. How deep a fervour it was and what an absorption! My whole body trembled at the sight, and I waited eagerly for day-break. I did not then understand much of divine afflatus and ecstasies. One night, seeing his

samadhi continuing interminably, I began weeping in fear and called in Hridaya with the help of Kali's mother (the maidservant). He went on repeating the Lord's name in his ears, till after quite a long time he returned to the conscious plane. Learning next day that I suffered from this kind of fear, the Master himself taught me, "If you notice such a kind of mood in me, then utter such a name; and if such another, then this other *Bija* (mystic syllable)." After this I was not so afraid; he regained consciousness when those names were uttered. Quite a long time passed in this way and then as he came to know one day afterwards, that in apprehension of his moods I sat up for the whole night and could not sleep, he asked me to sleep apart at the Nahabat.'

But wherever she might be, whether in the Master's room or at the Nahabat, she considered the service of the Master and his mother to be the one duty of her life. The old lady was then too feeble to move about freely, and so she depended much on the Holy Mother, who was well aware of this. Hence, whenever the old lady called her, she rushed to her side. If any one warned her that by such heedless dashing she ran the risk of striking her head against the low door-frame, she would reply, 'What if I do? She is my superior and my mother. Alas, she is old! If I don't hurry up, it may inconvenience her and so I run.' The old lady then lived upstairs and the Holy Mother on the ground floor of the Nahabat.

Equally whole-hearted was her service of the Master. The companionship that she had through this medium of service, she considered to be a fortune for herself. The communion through service was not confined to the physical plane alone. Whenever the Master came down to the conscious plane during this period, he was swayed by a feeling of womanliness within himself, so much so that he considered himself, as also the Holy Mother and others, as the maids or handmaids of the Universal Mother. The Mother then clothed and adorned him like a woman and felt

elated at the thought that just like the Master, she too was a maid of Kali. Again, she asserted no independence and showed no self-will in this act of service; she felt satisfied by doing the little the Master wanted and that in the manner he favoured.

A year after the Shodashi worship, the Mother fell ill. Shri Shambhunath Mallick had then succeeded Mathur Babu as the supplier of needs (*rasad-dar*, as the Master put it) for the Master. He called Prasad Babu, a physician, to treat her, but there was no relief. Realizing that then at Dakshineswar, she could be of no use to others and that on the contrary she would be adding to their anxiety, she left for Jayrambati.

IN A MOOD OF SELF-SURRENDER

About a year after the Shodashi worship, the Holy Mother returned to Jayrambati (about June, 1873) and visited Dakshineswar for the second time in May, next year. In the meanwhile Kamarpukur and Jayrambati were subjected to two grievous losses. In the second week of December, 1873, the Master's elder brother Rameshwar passed away. Next year, on the holy Rama-navami day (26th April), the Holy Mother's father Ramchandra Mukherji who was a staunch devotee of Sri Rama, breathed his last. That was a stunning blow to the Mukherji family. The incident was all the more poignant because it happened just on the fourth day after uncle Kalikumar had been invested with the sacred thread. To the Holy Mother, who was the first child of her father and had had his affection in abundance, the grief was unendurable; and soon after, she left for Dakshineswar perhaps to free herself from that poignant grief.

The extreme indigence of the Mukherjis might have had something to do with hastening this departure. The bereaved family had no money on hand; the boys were all very young; priestly service, which was a source of supplementary income, had become closed for the time being. Farming suffered because of lack of proper supervision. Though Ishwarchandra, Ramchandra's brother, earned something through priesthood in Calcutta, he had not much to send home after meeting his personal expenses. Finding herself in such straitened circumstances, Shyamasundari Devi became despondent and in utter helplessness proceeded to maintain the family with physical labour. The Banerjis of the village were better off at that time. Shyamasundari husked their paddy in her own house in return for one fourth of the rice produced. In giving some idea of her toil, she told Indumati Devi, one of her daughters-in-law, 'Leaving the rice boiling on the fire, I went to Shihar to get vegetables.

I cooked simultaneously on sixteen ovens put in a row, all for a potful of boiled rice and a basketful of uncooked rice.' Even then she could not earn enough for feeding the family and educating the boys. Accordingly, the boys took shelter in the houses of relatives in neighbouring villages. Prasanna went to Jibta, Varada got shelter in the house of Hareram Bhattacharya at Shihar, and Abhay went to his maternal uncle's¹ in the same village. The Holy Mother, perhaps for the same reason, went to Dakshineswar, where she took shelter in the Nahabat along with her mother-in-law.

Dakshineswar of those days was an unhealthy place, where dysentery prevailed during the wet season. The Mother suffered from it soon after her going there. Shambhu Babu arranged for her treatment, but she did not recover quickly. Nevertheless, the Holy Mother did not leave the place, for that would deprive her of the opportunity of serving the Master and his mother. She continued there for a full year although still ill.² At last when she was a little better, she left for Jayrambati (probably in September-October, 1875). But the dysentery returned a short while after, and it took such a serious turn that she became bed-ridden, nay, her life itself was in danger. When the Master got news of her sad condition, he said sorrowfully to Hridaya, 'What is it all coming to, O Hride! Is she destined only to come and go, and not do anything worthy of a human birth?'

During the period of relapse the Mother had to go out again and again and her body was very weak and emaciated. She laid herself down on the bank of the pond, Kalugede. Once when she saw in the water of the pond the reflection of her body reduced to skin and bone, she thought: 'Bah! Fie on it! This indeed is the body! Why fuss about it? Let it lie down here, let me leave it!' In later days she said, 'I was ill then; the whole body was swollen

1. They had five uncles Rambrahma, Ramtarak, Kedar, Shripati, and Vaikuntha and one aunt, Dinamayi. The family is now extinct.

2. 'I had returned to the country after suffering for a year at Dakshineswar' (*Sri Sri Mayer Katha*, II, 131).

and liquid matter flowed down from the nose and ears. Umesh (a brother) said, "Sister, there is Simhavahini here; will you make a vow of fasting before her?" It was he who made me agree and led me by the hand there. To me, then, a full-moon night was as dark as a newmoon one—I had lost sight through continuous tears. Going there I lay down on the basement of the shrine. To crown all, I had the dysentery; three or four times I had to crawl on all fours to go out. There was a woman whom I called 'god-mother'; her house was near at hand. She cleared her throat off and on, so that I might not get frightened. A little while later, She (the Deity) appeared to my mother in the form of a blacksmith girl of the age of Radhu (twelve or thirteen years) and said, "Go quick, hasten; raise her up and bring her. Give her this medicine; this indeed will relieve her." Besides, She said to me, "Apply to the eyes drops of juice of the gourd flower made into a paste with salt; that will relieve you." Then I took the medicine that mother had received, and applied to the eyes drops of juice of the gourd flower. As soon as I did so, all the foul matter fell off from the eyes. The eyes were cured that very day, and the swellings in the body subsided. I felt greatly relieved. I recovered. To every enquirer I said, "Mother (Simhavahini) gave the medicine." From that time on the Mother's fame spread around. I got the medicine, and the world also was blessed. Formerly nobody knew the Mother so much. My uncle made a vow of fasting before the Mother. But She let loose so many big ants that he was not allowed to stay. She appeared to my mother in a dream and said, "I am now in sleep;¹ why has he taken the vow of fasting now? He is a Brahmin; does he not know all this? Go quick, hasten; raise him and bring him." My mother said, "You have said so many things. Why shouldn't you have revealed the medicine also?"

1. The gods and goddesses sleep for six months following the summer solstice, and keep awake for six months after the winter solstice.

When life was despaired of, the Mother came round miraculously by taking refuge in the goddess. Humanity has here a demonstration of the infallibility of divine intervention, though it is not possible for all to rely absolutely on it; only those like the Holy Mother, whose hearts are full of devotion, succeed in this. But if the deity can once be made propitious through the supplication of such rare souls, weaker persons can share in the good fortune. The Holy Mother had a lifelong and incomparable devotion to Simhavahini. With full faith she took some earth from the basement of the shrine, kept it in a case, put some of this in her mouth now and then, asked her niece Radhu to do so, and related the legends of Her greatness to others. Encouraged by the Mother's success, others too offered vows to the Deity and got their wishes fulfilled thereby. This, as also the efficacy of that earth in curing diseases, spread the fame of Simhavahini all around, drawing even to this day numbers of pilgrims to Her shrine.

Chandramani Devi, the blessed mother of Shri Ramakrishna, passed away at the age of eighty-five on the 27th February, 1875, the birth-day of the Master. As the last moment drew near, the old lady was taken to the Ganges, and the Master offered flowers, sandal paste, and *tulasi* (holy basil) leaves at her feet.

The Holy Mother, was then at Jayrambati. She seemed to have fallen on evil days; because, hardly had she recovered from dysentery and family bereavement, when she had an attack of malaria with enlargement of the spleen. For treatment of the spleen trouble, she had to go to Kayapat-Badanganj where it was singed. This was a queer remedy of a bygone age. Its curative effect was disputable, but the suffering of the patient was indescribable. After ablution, the patient was made to lie on the ground and held down by some strong persons, so that he might not escape. Then the medicine-man would take in hand a burning piece of jujube wood and rub it on a plantain leaf laid over the region of the spleen. The skin

would get burnt and the patient would shriek and scream. It is said that the Master, too, had his spleen treated thus at the market-place of Kayapat-Badanganj. When Shyamasundari Devi went to the local Shiva temple with her daughter, some other people were undergoing the treatment; and the Holy Mother saw their plight and heard their screams. When her turn came, she stepped forward to the place after bath, and some persons advanced to hold her fast. But she said, 'Nobody need hold me; I myself shall lie down quietly.' And in fact she went through that ordeal in silence. The spleen shrank up for some reason and she regained her health.

It is an admitted fact that when God or any of His Powers incarnates, the avatar does not forthwith begin a frontal fight with adverse forces in the shape of existing institutions, but rather diverts them to new channels of usefulness, reorientates them, divests them of their malignant incrustations, or manifests his glory despite them. By thus demonstrating the force of spiritual ideals before erring humanity, the avatar encourages men to make fresh attempts for progress. We do not know what motives prompted such actions of the Mother; but she herself declared, 'I have done much more than is necessary for setting an ideal.' From such a standpoint of setting an ideal should we understand some of these anecdotes in the Mother's life, which otherwise seem to us—moderns, as irrational.

Religious writers agree that God becomes merciful through our devotion. We had a verification of this in the awakening of Simhavahini. Religious people are also agreed that any act or process that is taken recourse to by a holy man for the fulfilment of his objective, acquires such an extraordinary potency, that through it is achieved some result which could not otherwise have been predicted. In the contraction of the spleen we had a demonstration of this. The scriptures also declare that if the devotee is really earnest, God becomes gracious and abides for ever in

his house. This will be proved by the worship of the goddess Jagad-dhatri in Shyamasundari Devi's house at Jayrambati, to which event we shall now turn.

But before we actually do so, we shall have a peep back at the natural disposition of the Holy Mother. It is astonishing to think that an uneducated village girl like the Mother should not have lost her head or been puffed up with pride either at the sight of her husband being adored as an incarnation by the rich and cultured society of Calcutta, or by herself being worshipped by that most revered saint, who was the doyen of all spiritual giants in that city. On the contrary, she became all the more considerate towards her old acquaintances and more devoted to her village gods and goddesses. Her husband was not resourceless at the time but even so she did not worry or embarrass him by asking for monetary help even in the worst days of her privation. She preferred to endure her lot amidst the poverty of her paternal home; only at times did she lift her heart in prayer to God. It was no wonder, then, that where there was a combination of this absolute surrender on the part of the daughter with the unquestioning devotion of the simple-hearted mother Shyamasundari Devi, the worship of the powerful goddess Jagad-dhatri was possible in a poor mud-house.

Once, at the time of the Kali worship, Nava Mukherji, as a result of some village feud, did not accept the gifts of rice and other things from Shyamasundari Devi, which were her contribution to the joint endeavour at worship. She had gathered together these things with the greatest effort and the utmost sincerity; but another man's cruelty now deprived her of the chance of offering them to the Deity. Her sorrow was so painful that she spent a sleepless night and went on repeating, 'This rice I prepared for Kali, and this has not been accepted! Who will now eat this? Indeed, it is Kali's rice, and nobody else can eat it!' Then a Deity appeared to her in a dream and awakened her by patting her body. Opening her eyes, Shyamasundari Devi saw the

Deity, red in hue, sitting near the door with one leg placed over the other, who said, 'Why do you weep? I shall eat Kali's rice. Why do you worry?' Shyamasundari inquired, 'Who are you?' The Deity replied, 'I am the Mother of the Universe: I shall accept your worship as Jagad-dhatri.'

Next morning, Shyamasundari Devi said to the Holy Mother, 'Dear Sarada, who is that Deity with red hue, resting one leg on the other?' The Mother said, 'She is Jagad-dhatri, to be sure.' Grandmother then said, 'I shall worship Jagad-dhatri.' She went on talking about that worship off and on. She secured from the Vishwas family about 400 lbs. of paddy. It was then raining incessantly. Grandmother said, 'Mother, how shall I worship you? I can't so much as dry the paddy.' But through the grace of the Goddess it so happened, that though it rained all around, grandmother's mat, on which the paddy was spread, had plenty of sunshine; and she got it husked and converted into rice. The clay image of the Deity had to be painted after drying it under fire. Uncle Prasanna went to Dakshineswar to invite Sri Ramakrishna for the celebration. But he said, 'Mother will come, aye! Mother will come! That's excellent. But weren't you in very straitened circumstances, my dear?' Uncle replied, 'You have to come, I have come to take you.' The Master said, 'I am as good as already there. It's fine. Go, and have the worship. It's fine indeed! It will do you good.' The worship was duly performed. Many people from far and near were invited and heartily fed. The rice was enough for all. At the time of the immersion of the image grandmother whispered in the ears of the Goddess, 'My dear, Jagai, do come again next year. I shall be making arrangements for you all the year round.'

Next year, grandmother said to the Holy Mother, 'Look here, dear, you too should contribute something; my Jagai (Jagad-dhatri) will be worshipped.' The Mother remonstrated, 'I can't bear all that trouble. It's enough that you had the worship once; why rake up troubles again? There's no need; I can't do it.' Then she saw

three figures in a dream at night—Jagad-dhatri, with her maids Jaya and Vijaya—who said, ‘Well, shall we go then?’ ‘Who may you be?’ the Mother queried in surprise. ‘I am Jagad-dhatri,’ said the Deity. At this the Mother said with great consternation, ‘No, where will you go? No, no, where will you go? Do stay on, I didn’t ask you to go.’ Thenceforth the worship continued uninterruptedly for some years. The Mukherji family had not then enough hands to help in the festival. So the Holy Mother had to be present every year for scouring the utensils and doing some other odd jobs.

As the day of immersion of the image on the first occasion happened to be a Thursday sacred to the goddess of fortune, the Holy Mother objected to bidding farewell to Jagad-dhatri on that day. The next day was the last day of the month, and the next the first day of another month. Hence the immersion took place on the fourth day.

The worship in the first four years was performed in the name of Shyamasundari Devi, in the second four, in the name of the Holy Mother, and in the next four in the name of her uncle Nilmadhav. The Holy Mother felt no need for continuing the worship after twelve years, because all had had their names formally proposed as worshippers. That very night after she had made the declaration, the Deity appeared to her in a dream and intimated that the family of Madhu Mukherji’s aunt had it in mind to worship Her, and asked her three times, ‘Shall I go then?’ The Holy Mother realized that Jagad-dhatri wanted to leave her after getting her affirmation; and so she took hold of the feet of the Deity and said eagerly, ‘I won’t let you go any more, I shall worship you every year.’ With this determination in mind, she later on secured about three and a half acres of paddy land with which she made a trust for the continuance of the worship.¹ With the income from this land and some contributions from devotees, the authorities of the Ramakrishna Math, Belur, perform the worship every

1. The deed of trust was registered at Koalpara on 7-7-1916.

year with due pomp, at the Mother's temple at Jayrambati. And as in the first year, so now too, the worship continues for three successive days—on the first day with all ceremonials but on succeeding days not so elaborately as was the custom during Mother's lifetime. One on each side of the main Deity Jagad-dhatri, are placed images of Jaya and Vijaya. The devotees of the Holy Mother believe that as the Mother was none other than Jagad-dhatri Herself, when the latter is worshipped the Holy Mother too is adored as a matter of course.

IN LIGHT AND SHADE

The Mother continued to live at Jayrambati for some time after recovering from malaria and spleen trouble. Perhaps, she returned to Dakshineswar in the winter of 1877 following the first Jagad-dhatri worship. We noted earlier that Providence had led Shambhu Babu to step into the shoes of Mathur Babu as the supplier of the Master's needs, and that he had been serving the Master and the Mother with whole-hearted devotion. His wife, too, adored the Master as God himself; and whenever the Holy Mother happened to be at Dakshineswar, the lady took her to her house every Tuesday to make offerings at her holy feet as she would have made at a deity's. It did not take long for a warm and generous-hearted man like Shambhu Babu to realize that for the Holy Mother who was used to the ease and freedom of the village, living in a small place like the Nahabat, which was nothing better than a cage, would be very uncomfortable. So he purchased for Rs. 250/- a small plot of rent-free land near the temple premises, on which he planned to build a thatched house for her. Coming to learn of this, Captain Vishwanath Upadhyaya, who was a staunch devotee of the Master and was in charge of the timber yard of the Nepal Government at Belur, across the river, offered to supply free of cost, the *sal* wood necessary for the purpose. And so three *sal* logs were sent with the flow-tide to Dakshineswar. But at night another high tide carried away one of the logs. Hridaya read a bad omen in this and castigated his aunt saying, 'You are ill-starred.' He made also some other uncharitable remarks. But Captain Upadhyaya, unmindful of the loss, sent another log. The house was thus completed, and the Mother took her residence there¹ with a maid-servant, engaged to keep her

1. For the sequence of events here we rely mainly on the Holy Mother's own account. She says, 'Then (at the time of Chandramani Devi's death) I was ill—I had gone to my village home after suffering for a year at

company and help her in her domestic duties. And soon after, Hridaya's wife also joined her there.

The Mother cooked the Master's food there according to his taste and needs and carried it to his room, where she sat till he had finished. For looking after the comforts of the Mother or for her satisfaction, the Master, too, often visited the cottage during the daytime and spent some time with her. One day it rained so heavily just after his arrival there, that unable to return, he had to finish his meal there and then lie down for the night. From the bed he said to the Mother laughing, 'This is as though I have come home like any priest of the Kali temple going home at night.'

The Mother could not live in this thatched shed for long. She had to return to the Nahabat for attending on the Master who, as we said, had a bad attack of dysentery. As the Master became too weak to walk far away from the room, the Mother used to come from the new house to help him. Just then, fortuitously enough, an aged woman came to the Kali temple from Banaras. Little or nothing was known about her past, and we know even less of her life after the Dakshineswar days. She came like a flash of lightning for fulfilling a divine duty, and disappeared completely when it was over. The Holy Mother searched in vain for her when she went to Banaras. This aged woman volunteered to serve the Master, but realizing that for various reasons she was not equal to the task, she told the Mother, 'It's odd, my dear, that you should be staying here when he is so ill there!' The Mother replied, 'How can I help it? How can my nephew's wife be left alone? My nephew Hridaya is there with the Master.' The woman said, 'Let them carry on as best as they can. Does it befit you now to be

Dakshineswar. After I had visited (Dakshineswar) twice or thrice...Shambhu Babu had the house constructed...In that house I stayed for some days...At last an aged woman from Banaras persuaded me and had brought me to the Nahabat from the house...Next time (fourth time) myself, my mother, Lakshmi, and some others came to Dakshineswar.' Shambhu Babu gifted the house on 11-4-1876 and he passed away in 1877.

away from him?' The Mother admitted the force of this and shifted to the Nahabat to engage herself in the Master's service more completely.

Up till now the Mother had remained veiled before the Master. The Banaras woman one night took her to the Master and in his presence removed her veil. The Master, who was in an ecstatic mood, went on discoursing about divine things which kept them spell-bound. It was dawn when he stopped and they took leave of him.

It is not known when the Mother went again to Jayrambati. But about her return to Dakshineswar for the fourth time, she herself said, 'Well, the next time my mother, Lakshmi, myself and some others went to Dakshineswar. I made a votive offering of my hair and nails at Tarakeswar for recovery from my last ailment. As (my brother) Prasanna was with us, we first went to his rented house in Calcutta. It was perhaps in the month of March (1881). Next day, we all went to Dakshineswar. No sooner were we there than Hridaya for some reason best known to him, said, "Why have they come? What have they got to do here?" He showed his disrespect to them in this way. My mother made no reply to all this. Hridaya was a man of Shihar and my mother too was a girl of that village. Hridaya utterly ignored my mother when she said, "Come, let us go back home; with whom shall I leave my daughter here?" For fear of Hridaya, the Master kept mum all through. We all left that very day. Ramlal called a boat for crossing the river.'

With the deepest disappointment the Mother left,—she could not stay at Dakshineswar even for a day! Apart from this solitary grievance, the unassuming selfless wife had no complaint against the Master at all, or any ill-feeling towards her nephew. But all her sorrows and all her complaints were laid at the feet of the Almighty whose will rules everywhere. And so at the time of departure, she told Mother Kali Who dwelt within her mind, 'Mother, I shall revisit this place only if You will have me here again.'

If the Almighty rejected a suppliant who had absolutely surrendered herself, whom else could she implore for righting the wrong? The futile fourth visit thus ended abruptly.

Hridaya, in the pride of his heart, transgressed the limits of courtesy. May be, he had some satisfaction at this apparent triumph. But the unseen hand of destiny was shaping his future in another way. This was not the first instance of his rudeness to the Holy Mother. On another occasion Sri Ramakrishna who noticed such misbehaviour reprimanded him saying, 'My dear Hride, you may be talking to this (pointing to his own body) slightly, but don't you do so to her. If the one that is in this (body) raises its hood, you may still be saved; but if the one that is in her raises its hood even Brahma, Vishnu, and Maheshwara cannot save you.' Egotistic as Hridaya had become, the warning made no impression on his hard heart; and so, through the force of circumstances he had to leave the temple precincts for good to clear the way for the Mother's return. Through his foolhardiness he worshipped on the anniversary day of the opening of the temple (June, 1881), the little daughter of Trailokyanath, a son of Mathur Babu, as the divine Gauri;¹ whereupon Trailokya fearing that some evil would befall the girl, dismissed Hridaya from his service.

Then the Master's nephew Ramlal succeeded Hridaya as the priest of Kali. On getting this promotion he was elated with the thought, 'How grand! I have become the priest of Mother Kali,' and became unmindful of his duty towards Sri Ramakrishna. The Master used to be very frequently in *samadhi*, so that unless somebody reminded him of the *prasada* sent from the temple and coaxed him to eat it, it would lie in his room uncared for and become stale or dried up. There was none besides Ramlal who

1. It is usual to adore little brahmin girls as symbols of the divine Mother. Trailokya a non-brahmin feared that the worship of his daughter by a brahmin would spell ruin.

could really serve the Master with devotion. So, the Master suffered, and he sent word to the Mother through people who happened to go to those parts, to rejoin him at Dakshineswar. Thus through Lakshman Pain he sent the message: 'I am suffering here; Ramlal has joined the other priests after becoming the priest of Mother Kali, and he does not now look after me properly. You must come, be it by a *doli*¹ or a palanquin; and I shall meet the expenses, be they ten rupees or twenty.' This earnest call made the Mother at last come to Dakshineswar (probably in February-March, 1882). This was her fifth visit after staying away for about a year.

The next time she went to Jayrambati, she spent there some seven or eight months, coming back to Dakshineswar in January-February, 1884. It was at this time that the Master tumbled down when in a state of ecstasy, and as a result had a bone in the left hand dislocated. As soon as the Mother entered the Master's room and saluted him, placing the bundle of clothes on the floor, he inquired, 'When did you start?' Ascertaining from her reply that she had started in the afternoon of a Thursday, which is regarded as extremely inauspicious, he said, 'There it is! I got my hand injured because you started on Thursday afternoon. Go back; go and make a fresh start.' The Mother wanted to leave that very day; but the Master said, 'Stay today; you can go tomorrow.' The very next day the Mother left for her village home to recommence the journey on a more auspicious day.

It is not known when the Mother went home from Dakshineswar again, nor when she returned. But it is a fact that she was at Kamarpukur at Ramlal's marriage in 1884 and returned to Dakshineswar in the beginning of the next year. From this time on, most probably she did not visit Jayrambati again during the Master's lifetime.

1. A litter, being a cheaper and smaller prototype of the palanquin.

We have tried to be as accurate as possible about the number and times of the Mother's journeys between Jayrambati and Dakshineswar; but in getting a more accurate idea, we have to take another factor into consideration. During the period beginning with the date of completion of the Master's austerity up to the year 1880, he used to go to Kamarpukur every year during the rains and spend there three or four months. His physicians advised him to go to the country at that time of the year to recoup his health which had been impaired by austerity. It is known that when steamers began to ply from Calcutta to Ghatal on the river Rupnarayana, the Master once went home with the Mother and Hridaya along that route. They got down from the steamer probably at Bandar and then proceeded by boat to Bali-Dewanganj which lies about eight miles south of Kamarpukur. That was a Vaishnava village. A merchant of the Modaka caste of that village cherished the idea of accommodating some saintly man in his new house for three nights. After the arrival of the Master and the Mother, the weather became so inclement that they had to spend three nights at the house. On the fourth day they went to Hriday's village, Shihar. It was during this visit that the Master inspired the people around by joining the *kirtana* parties at Shihar and Shyambazar, who sang continuously for days.

The Master visited Jayrambati quite a number of times. Whenever he happened to be at Kamarpukur, he used to be taken to Shihar, and he would visit Jayrambati on the way stopping there sometimes for more than a week. During one of these nights at Jayrambati, when all were asleep, the Master suddenly got up and said that he was hungry. The women of the house were in a quandary, for as a consequence of a feast that day, no food was left over except a little rice soaked in a pot of water. The Mother passed on the information to the Master with not a little hesitation, for that was not the kind of food to be offered to a guest at that hour of the night. But the

Master said, 'Fetch it.' 'But there's no curry,' put in the Mother. 'Why not make a little search?' suggested the Master. 'Do see, if even a little of the curry you prepared is left in the pan.' The Mother found a little bit of curry and placed this before the Master which made him very happy and he satisfied his hunger with the food thus got together.

The Mother usually covered the distance from Jayram-bati or Kamarpukur to Dakshineswar on foot. Once when some village women started for Calcutta for a dip in the Ganges on some sacred day, the Mother, too, accompanied them with her nephew Sivaram and her niece Lakshmi Devi. Her idea was to stay on at Dakshineswar after the holy bath. It was settled that their first halt should be at Arambagh which was eight miles from Kamarpukur; for in front lay the uninhabited, notorious stretches of fields called Telo-bhelo which were infested with robbers. People would not cross them alone even in daylight. As a reminder of those fearful days there is still the terrible image of the goddess Kali in the heart of Telo-bhelo which the robbers used to invoke before engaging in their nefarious activities. The image is still called the robbers' Kali. On the day we are speaking of, the party from Kamarpukur decided after reaching Arambagh that there was plenty of time left for a moderate walker to reach Tarakeswar before it became too dark and that it was not wise to waste a day for rest which was not really wanted. The Mother was well-known even from her early age for her unobtrusiveness; if need arose she would endure discomfort to make it easier for others. In the present instance too, she restarted with them, though she knew well enough that her tired legs could not bear such prolonged strain. Soon she began to lag behind others. Her companions halted three or four times to allow her to

1. From a foot-note on p. 12 of the 2nd edition of the fifth part of the *Kathamrita* it seems that at this time the Master stayed in those parts from 3rd March to 13th October, 1880.

catch up with them. But when at last they were convinced that she could not keep pace with them and that such slow movement would expose all to inevitable danger or even death, and when on top of all this the Mother asked them not to worry about her but to go forward, they quickened their steps and were soon lost to sight, while the Mother trudged on all alone.

When the sun set and the darkness of night began fast enveloping everything around, the Mother was still plodding on across the solitary fields of Telo-bhelo, full of anxiety, but finding no way out. Just then she noticed a tall figure emerging out of the darkness and approaching her. When the figure had drawn sufficiently near, the Mother saw that it was a man of deep dark colour and thick long hair who had a stout staff on his shoulder and silver bangles round his wrists. She knew that he was a robber, and terror-stricken, she halted at once. The man had no difficulty in understanding her mind, and with a view to terrifying her all the more he said in a harsh voice, 'Hullo! Who is that standing there at this time? Where would you go?' 'Eastward,' said the Mother. 'This is not the way there; you have to go that way,' said the man. The Mother still made no movement, and the man came very close. But as he looked at the Mother's face, there came a sudden change in his demeanour, and the cruel man-hunter said softly, 'Don't be afraid; I have a woman with me who has fallen back.' At this the Mother's eyes were taken off the immediate danger and extended further off where, sure enough, a woman was moving up. Then she got encouraged and said, 'Father, my companions have left me behind, besides, methinks, I have lost my way. Will you kindly take me to them? Your son-in-law lives in the Kali temple of Rani Rasmani at Dakshineswar. I am on my way to him. If you take me to that place he will treat you very cordially.' The woman came up before the Mother had finished and the latter took hold of her hand with full confidence and affection and said, 'Mother, I am your daughter Sarada; I was in a terrible

plight having been left behind by my companions. Fortunately you and father appeared; otherwise I can't say what I would have done.' This simple behaviour, extreme confidence, and sweet disposition conquered the hearts of the robber couple who belonged to the lowly Bagdi caste. As a result they forgot the gulf of social difference that separated them from a brahmin woman and consoling her as though she was truly a daughter of theirs, did not allow her to proceed further because she was tired. They took her to a little shop nearby, where the woman improvised a bed for her with her clothes and other things and the man brought some fried-rice for her to eat. Then she was laid to rest with extreme affection, the man keeping guard at the door with his staff.

At dawn, when they were on their way to Tarakeswar, the Bagdi mother picked up green peas from the field for the Holy Mother. The latter accepted the affectionate gift like a little girl and put them in her mouth. They reached Tarakeswar about an hour and a half after sunrise. Here the Bagdi woman said to her husband, 'My daughter had nothing to eat at night; finish the worship of the Lord Tarakeswar (Shiva) soon, and bring some good things from the market; she has to be fed properly today.' When the man was out, the companions of the Holy Mother who had been out in search of her came to that place and were delighted to find her safe. Then the Mother introduced them to her Bagdi mother who had given her shelter on the previous night and said, 'If they had not appeared and saved me, I don't know what I would have done last night.'¹

1. There is a little controversy in the printed literature whether the Mother had any companion with her. The *Lilaprasanga*, *Divyabhava* (pp. 260-64) says categorically that there was none. The controversy seems to have arisen because of the Mother's reluctance to be adequately communicative about the circumstances of the incident. Once when she was questioned about this before Swami Ishanananda, the Mother avoided a direct answer and then told the Swami in confidence, 'See, what a fuss they make about hearing this robber story again and again. I don't want to talk. Lakshmi, Shibu, and

It is no longer possible to ascertain how this event was viewed by the pilgrims from Kamarpukur who were uncultured and steeped in caste prejudices. Nor can we gauge how far they realized the full import of that extraordinary drama of affection that was enacted on the solitary field at nightfall, and the intimate relationship that was established between the robber couple who belonged to a very low caste and the brahmin girl who was picked up at that odd hour from a very odd place. Nor do we get any inkling of any light having flashed across the minds of those ignorant villagers with regard to the victory of that sacred, though as yet unfolded motherhood over the cruelty of the robber, or the supremacy of light over darkness when the two came into conflict. As unbiased witnesses, we only find the Holy Mother, the robber couple, and the Kamarpukur pilgrims co-operating like a family in a common endeavour for their noon-day meal, and after finishing it in a very cordial atmosphere, starting for Baidyabati on the way to Calcutta.

The Mother and the Bagdi couple had drawn so close to one another during that single night, that all the three began to shed profuse tears at the thought of separation. As the pilgrims moved onward, the Bagdi couple accompanied them for some distance, and the woman picked up some peas with eager hands from the fields and tying them to the hem of the Mother's garment said in a choked voice, 'Dear daughter Sarada, when you chew your fried-rice at night, add these to it.' At last the Holy Mother got a promise from the couple that they would visit Dakshineswar and then managed to take leave of them. The couple kept their promise visiting Dakshineswar more than once with various gifts for the Mother. Sri Ramakrishna, coming to know the whole

others, though they were with me, left me. Now if that question arises they would feel sore and look small. Howsoever that might have been, they are my nephew and my niece. If I go on repeatedly narrating the incident they become dishonoured. So I avoid the point. Others don't understand it. It's no good asking me again and again.' In fact, the Mother did not admit the presence of anybody else.

incident behaved with them like a true son-in-law. The Mother, however, when relating the incident to the devotees ended it with this significant remark: 'Though my robber parents were so simple and well-behaved, still it strikes me that they did commit robbery off and on in their earlier days.' In other words, she never looked upon that thrilling incident on that lonesome plain of Telo-bhelo as an ordinary event.

It is beyond our capacity to imagine an adequate reason for the sudden change of mind of the robbers. It might have been that the uncommon guilelessness of the Mother and her immaculate holiness exerted an irresistible influence on their minds or it might have been that some supernormal factor was at work. That the second surmise is not baseless is apparent from what the Holy Mother told a devotee in the course of a conversation. It had reached the ears of the devotees that when the Mother once asked her Bagdi parents, 'Why, my dears, are you so attached to me?' they replied, 'You are not, in fact, an ordinary mortal, for we saw you as Kali.' 'How you speak my dears! How could you have seen me so?' remonstrated the Mother. Unabashed they said in an aggrieved voice, 'No, Mother, there was no mistake about what we saw. You want to hide this from us since we are sinners.' To this the Mother said indifferently, 'Who knows? I am not in the least aware of it.'¹

1. Shri Ashutosh Mitra in the Bengali book, *Shri Ma* (pp. 31-32) depicts the concluding portion of the event thus: The Mother says, "The Man was a Bagdi by caste. With a harsh voice like that of a robber he demanded, "Who art thou!" and he kept on looking at me with his mouth wide agape." A devotee inquired, 'What did the robber see as he looked at you thus?' The Mother said, 'He talked afterwards of having seen me as Kali.' The devotee said, 'Then you revealed yourself to him as Kali. Speak out, Mother don't hide it, Please.' The Mother said, 'Why should I reveal it? He said that he saw me as Kali.' The devotee said, 'That's all the same—you revealed yourself.' The Mother said with a smile, 'You may take it that way if you like it so.'

A LIGHT UNDER A BUSHEL

Whenever the Mother was at Kamarpukur or at Dakshineswar, she usually had with her either her mother-in-law, or the Bhairavi Brahmani, or her sister-in-law, or Hridaya, who regulated her movements in many ways. Hence, though her relation with the Master was most intimate, its outer expression had some extraneous influence imposed upon it. Now we shall study the divine relationship between the Master and the Mother unencumbered by any extraneous influence whatever. And yet in their free and sweet interchanges there was no meaningless sentimentalism, no mere emotional exuberance. In everything she did, the Mother was calm and collected without being lifeless, and bright and transparent without being blinding. It requires the closest attention to comprehend fully the different forms that the purity and modesty of the Mother took in the midst of this self-regulated freedom.

Apart from the few days that the Mother lived in the thatched house built by Shambhu Babu, she spent the rest of her Dakshineswar days in the small Nahabat¹. Those were extremely uncomfortable days; and the Mother, too, felt similarly. She said, 'When I was at the Nahabat for serving the Master, in what discomfort I had to live in that small room, and what a lot of things lay huddled together there! Sometimes, I was all alone...Golap, Gaur-dasi and others stayed there now and then. Ex-

1. The Nahabat is a two-storeyed brick structure, about 75 ft. north of the Master's room. It is on the Ganges, on the way to the Panchavati where the Master used to meditate. The room downstairs is octagonal in shape, each wall measuring 3' 3" inside and the maximum distance between the walls across the floor being 7' 9". The floor area is a little less than 50 sft. Round the room is a verandha 4' 3" in width more or less. The only opening, a door on the southern side, measure 4' 2" x 2' 2". On the eastern side of the verandha is the staircase leading upstairs. Under this the Mother had her kitchen. During the Mother's stay, the verandah was surrounded by a thin screen of plaited bamboo chips.

tremely small though the room was, yet in it were carried on cooking, sleeping, eating,—why, everything. Cooking was done for the Master, for often enough, he suffered from poor digestion, and the *prasada* of Kali did not suit him. There was cooking for the devotees too. Latu was there; he came there having quarrelled with Ram Datta. The Master said, “This is a fine boy; he will knead the dough for you.” There was no end to cooking, night or day. Ram Datta, for instance, came there and called out as soon as he alighted from the carriage, “I shall take today gram soup and *chapati*¹.” No sooner I heard this, than I started cooking here. There used to be *chapatis* made out of six to eight pounds of flour. Rakhal stayed here (with the Master); very often *khichudi* was cooked for him. Surendra Mitra used to pay ten rupees every month for the expenses of the devotees. Senior Gopal used to get things from the market.² ..In the beginning my head would strike frequently against the door-frame as I entered the room; one day I even suffered a bad cut. But gradually I got used to it, and my head would bend as I approached the door. Fat women from Calcutta used to come to visit me, and standing at the doorway and holding the door-frame on either side with both hands, they would say, “Alas! In what a room our dear good lady is living—it’s like living in banishment” ..I used to bathe at four in the morning. Whenever there was a little sunshine on the steps in the afternoon, I used to get my hair sunned. There was only one room on the ground floor of the Nahabat, and that was stacked with

1. Indian bread made of wheat flour flattened into round discs and baked in fire.

2. Of the persons mentioned here Golap (or Golap-Ma) and Gaur-dasi (or Gauri-Ma) were women devotees of the Master, the former afterwards becoming a constant companion of the Mother. Latu, Rakhal, and Senior Gopal (or Gopal-dada) renounced the world, assuming the names Swami Adbhutananda, Swami Brahmananda, and Swami Advaitananda. The last named was older even than the Master and hence had the epithet ‘Senior’. The rest were all lay disciples.

goods. Overhead were slings on which were hung potfuls of domestic titbits...The worst source of inconvenience was inadequacy of the facilities for bathing and personal cleanliness.¹ Through forced confinement I developed physical trouble...And those fisherwomen were my companions. When they came for a bath in the Ganges, they kept their baskets on the verandah and went down for their dip. They talked a lot with me and took away their baskets when returning home. At night I heard the fishermen sing as they caught fish.'

The Mother lived on the ground floor of the Nahabat and cooked below the staircase. She was too shy to come out during the daytime. Yogin-Ma thus described the Mother's daily routine at the Nahabat: 'Finishing her bath before four o'clock in the morning the Holy Mother sat for meditation; for the Master used to insist on meditation. Then she commenced her worship after finishing her other duties. The worship, *japa* (telling of beads), and meditation would take about an hour and a half. Then she sat for cooking under the staircase. When the cooking was over, if she got the opportunity, she would rub oil on the Master's body with her own hands before his bath. The Master sat for his dinner between half past ten and eleven. Whenever he went for his bath, the Mother hurriedly prepared betel rolls for him as she kept on watching for his return. When he returned, the Mother would spread a small carpet for him to sit on for his meal, and keep ready a glass of drinking water. Then she would carry to him a plate of food. As he sat for his meal, she would converse on various topics just taking care lest his meal should be spoiled by any upsurge of spiritual emotion. None but the Mother could prevent such sudden upsurges during meal time. When the Master had finished eating, the

1. There was no bath-room. When Yogin-Ma, a woman devotee of the Master and later a constant companion of the Mother, visited Dakshineswar, she noticed all this and took up the matter with the others. As a result there was some minor improvement.

Mother would hurriedly take something herself and drink a glass of water. Then she would make betel rolls. That over, she would sing in a low tone, and that very cautiously lest she should be overheard. Then when the mill blew the whistle at one o'clock, she sat down for her food, so that her lunch was never finished before half past one or two. After food she would take some nominal rest and then would sit down on the steps at about three for drying her hair. Then she would turn to trimming the lights and doing other odd bits of work, and then get ready for evening duties after somehow washing her body and clothes with the little water she kept in the Nahabat. When evening came, she would light the lamps and after waving the censer with the burning incense before the deities, sit for meditation. This was usually followed by cooking for the night, and the Mother would have her supper after all had finished. At last she would lie down after a little respite.'

Once, before dawn, when she was getting down the steps for a bath in the Ganges she almost trod on a crocodile which taking alarm at the Mother's approach jumped into the river. Thenceforth, she never went for a bath without a lantern.

Numerous inconveniences and handicaps, heavy duties and troubles were there; but the Mother never really worried about them. In later days, when casually alluding to all these troubles, she would sum up saying, 'Yet I knew no other suffering..No discomfort could touch me if it was for his (Master's) service. The day passed on joyously and quietly amidst everything.' Some may fancy that there was nothing unusual in this her sense of joy. (For was it not really good luck to live near the great Master, that fountain of bliss who drew large crowds to Dakshineswar, and whose sweet words charmed thousands into forgetting all the worries and anxieties of life in his presence? This attitude may appeal to those who do not care to look at the matter more deeply. But how many in real life feel that kind of attraction for the Master even after knowing

so much of his greatness? How many even during his life did so, and how many among those who felt that love stayed on at Dakshineswar? We have also to remember that the Holy Mother whose life revolved round the Master alone, had seldom even a distant view of him. She said, 'Sometimes even during as long a period as two months, I could'nt see him even once. I composed myself by saying "O mind, what merit have you earned that you will get his *darshan* (sight) every day?"' Standing erect (behind the screen of plaited bamboo chips, with which the verandah of the Nahabat was surrounded), I used to hear the lines that he sometimes added extempore to the *kirtana* songs. This produced rheumatism.' Would but one stop to consider for a while the absolute purity of heart and incomparable love that are necessary for standing long hours behind a screen just for the sake of having an incomplete glimpse of the Master through a hole and deriving pleasure thereby! Though the Mother was then physically separated from the Master, her heart ever hovered around him. The number of devotees visiting the Master at that time was quite considerable, and throughout the day and till late into the night there was a continuous flow of music solo or choral, dancing, and ecstatic moods. The Mother saw and heard these and thought within herself, 'If but I were one of the devotees over there, I would then be ever so near the Master, and would hear so many things!' Here on one side is the new Incarnation giving free and varied expression to his message for the age, and on the other side is the Mother of the Universe keeping herself under the voluntary restraints of a monotonous life; on the one side is sparkling disport and on the other eager gazing—this is altogether a rare phenomenon! Those days might have had their ups and downs. Near as she was, she was still very far; and yet in the memory of the Holy Mother the troubles and tribulations of those days were obliterated as she looked back lingeringly at the bliss that suffused her life as a whole in spite of all impediments; and she said, 'In what bliss I was! What a

curiously mixed crowd of people came to see him then! Dakshineswar used then to be a mart of joy!'

The Master was not, of course, unmindful of her comforts; on the contrary he tried to keep her happy in every way. He called that little room a cage, surrounded as it was by bamboo chips. Lakshmi Devi, his niece, too, often stayed there. The Master called them in fun a pair of parrots. When Mother Kali's *prasada* was sent from the temple to the Master's room, he said to his nephew Ramlal, 'Hullo! There is that pair of parrots in the cage. Carry to them some gram and fruits.' New comers naturally thought that there were some real birds; even Master Mahashaya¹ laboured long under that wrong impression. When Lakshmi Devi was not there, the thought of the rheumatism and loneliness of the Holy Mother worried the Master very much. He said to her, 'If a wild bird lives in a cage it becomes rheumatic; you should go out now and then to have a stroll in the neighbourhood.' He did not stop with this. When visitors had left the temple premises at noon, he would go to her and ask her to walk out through the backdoor to spend some time with the wife of one Sri Pandye. The Mother used to return after the evening services when the Panchavati side became quiet again.

Sometimes the Master created funny situations as though to impress on others the unique intimacy of the relationship that he had with the Mother. Once when a discussion arose whether the Master or a certain devotee had a fairer skin, the Master appointed the Mother as the umpire. He told her that she would have to watch them and formulate her opinion as they walked by the Nahabat northward of the Panchavati. The Master's colour was at that time fair and bright like pure gold and could hardly be distin-

1. Mahendranath Gupta, the writer of the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* in Bengali. As he was a teacher in a High School, the devotees called him Master. Mahashaya means a dignified man, and is equivalent to 'Mr'.

guished from the gold amulet on his arm. Yet, the Mother, an impartial judge, pronounced her verdict in favour of his rival.

In fact, the current of love of this divine couple was equally strong at either bank; the Master was as warmly attached to the Mother as she was to him. Gauri-Ma once said, 'Though these two sometimes did not see each other for six months together, in spite of being only about seventy-five feet apart, how deep indeed was their love for each other!' Once when the Mother had a headache the Master felt extremely anxious and went on asking Ramlal again and again: 'O Ramlal, why does that headache trouble her?'

The Master saw to it that the Mother was not needlessly overburdened with work, busy as she was the whole day. Once while on a walk with Rakhal in the garden of Beni Pal of Sinthi, he came across some ghosts who implored him to leave the garden, as the holy atmosphere he diffused around him was too strong for them to bear. It had been arranged earlier that he would spend the night in the garden; but the importunity of the spirits made him change the plan at once. He called a carriage and returned to the temple premises at dead of night when the gate was closed. He got it opened and walked in. The Mother, whose mind was ever eager for any opportunity of service to him, got up at the sound of his steps and said to the maidservant, 'O Jadu's-mother, how shall we manage?' They were talking in the Nahabat; but the Master's careful ears caught the sound. He sized up the situation at once and said, 'Don't you worry, my dears, we have had our meals already.'

The question of the Mother's maintenance after his passing away was also present in his mind. Though detachment from worldly affairs was a point of faith with him, he asked the Mother, 'How much money would you require for your personal needs?' The Mother replied, 'I can manage it with, say, five or six rupees.' Then he inquired, 'How many

chapatis do you eat in the evening?' The Mother blushed at this personal question and hung her head in shame without answering. But the Master went on repeating his question and she had to reply at last, 'Say, five or six.' On that basis the Master calculated and said, 'Then it'll be quite enough if you have five or six hundred rupees.' Afterwards he deposited that amount of money with Balaram Babu¹ who invested it in his own estate and sent her thirty rupees every half year as the accruing income.

It is a wonder to think how a god-intoxicated soul like the Master could keep his attention fixed on so many things. Adored as God by devotees who were ever at his beck and call, he could never be unmindful of her prestige and independence. As for his courtesy towards the Mother, we get an attestation from her own words: 'I was fortunate to be wedded to a husband who never addressed me as thou (*tui*). The Master never hurt me even with a flower, never called me "thou" in place of "you" (*tumi*).'² One day the Mother carried to the Master's room his scanty dishes consisting of very thin pieces of cake (made by spreading liquid flour on a flat frying pan) and *soojee* (semolina) porridge. As she was leaving the room after placing the dishes at the proper place, the Master thought it was his niece Lakshmi and called out, 'Mind, thou (*tui*) shuttest the door.' The Mother said, 'Yes, here I close it.' Recognizing the Mother's voice, he became greatly embarrassed and apologized, 'Ah, it's you! I thought it was Lakshmi. Don't you mind this.' Nay, that unintentional disrespect upset him so much that the very next morning he went to the Mother's door and said, 'Look here, my dear, I had no sleep last night, because of brooding over my rudeness to you.' As an illustration of the honour in

1. A staunch devotee of the Master and one of his *rasad-dars* (suppliers of needs), who lived in Calcutta but had estates in Orissa.

2. In Bengali *tui* (thou, Hindi *tu*) is used for addressing inferiors or little ones, *tumi* (you, Hindi *tum*) for friends, equals, parents, brothers, sisters etc; and *apani* (Hindi *ap*) for respected persons.

which the Holy Mother was held by the Master who regarded all women as the veritable manifestation of the Mother of the Universe, he told the devotees that he saluted the Mother after she had rubbed his feet with her hands. On another occasion he said, 'I wanted to go to a certain place. When Ramlal's aunt (the Mother) was consulted she forbade me; so I gave up the idea.'

Though the Master thus honoured the Mother and treated her with utmost consideration, he knew that there was a wide difference between them in age and experience. Moreover, there was none else to instruct the Mother either about worldly matters or about spiritual practices. So he himself gladly shouldered the duty. For instance, he said to the Mother, 'One has to work; women should not sit idle, for if one sits idle, many vain thoughts, nay evil ideas, may crop up.' The Mother once said, 'He brought me some raw jute and said, "Twist this and make slings for me; I shall keep (in them) sweets, etc., for the boys." I twisted it into strings and made slings; and with the waste fibres and a piece of thick cloth I made a pillow. I used to spread a coarse mat over a piece of hessian and put that pillow under my head. I slept as soundly on those things as I do now on these (cots, etc.)—I don't find any difference, my child!'

In fact, owing to her own nature and the teaching of the Master, she followed his instruction, 'Adapt yourself to time, space, and person,' so perfectly, that even the Master once said to Hridaya in wonder: 'O Hridu, I had great apprehension, lest she, a village girl, should, by her rustic behaviour incur public criticism and put us to shame. But as to that she is so cautious that nobody knows her movements; even I never saw her going out.' The Master undoubtedly meant this as a compliment. But the Mother became very much worried, thinking, 'Ah me! The Mother of the Universe actualizes for him whatever idea crosses his mind; and now, methinks, I shall catch his eyes whenever I go out.' To avert this she prayed, 'O Mother,

kindly protect my modesty.' That prayer was so fully granted that though she lived at Dakshineswar for a long time, she escaped public gaze so completely that the cashier of the temple, the chief resident officer, when asked about her said once, 'I have heard that she is here; but I have never seen her.'

Though the Mother was very shy and effaced herself completely, subduing herself to the will of the Master, yet in one respect she maintained her independence and that was in the domain of her motherhood. Of this we shall have many instances; for the present we shall deal with three only. The Mother had not many companions then; the fisherwomen came frequently; a maid-servant too, was there for some time; and at times there would be a few women visitors from Calcutta. The number of devotees was not very large. At that time there used to come to her an old woman who had lived a somewhat loose life in her youth; but now like a devotee she prayed to the Lord and came often alone to the Mother who talked in a friendly spirit. Noticing this, the Master said one day, 'Why is that woman here?' The Mother expostulated, 'She talks now only of Hari. What's the harm in that?' The Mother knew that human nature changes, that even evil characters repent and become good. On the other hand, the Master's sense of duty warned him that the Holy Mother should be protected from the company of persons who might come with impure motives. Besides, intimacy with such undesirable people might rouse adverse criticism from worldly-minded visitors. So he said with disdain, 'Pooh, pooh! a public woman! To think of chatting with her, whatever the extenuating factors! What a nasty idea!' The Mother certainly understood the need for caution. Whatever might have been her past, she now trod the path of virtue and looked upon the Holy Mother as her own mother. How could the Holy Mother then drive away one who wanted to be comforted—the Mother whose life was to be a solace to thousands of sinners and spiritual wanderers? And all that cruelty she

was to show for the sake of mere social propriety! The conversations, therefore, went on as before even after the Master's observation. The Master too, intuitively understanding the Mother's feeling, did not refer to the matter again.

Subsequently, when visitors became more numerous and fruits and sweets and other offerings were placed at the feet of the Master in plenty, he used to send these to the Nahabat. It was found, however, that apart from the little that was needed for the Master, the Mother did not care to retain them, but gave them away freely to the women and young devotees and the children of the neighbourhood who came to her. Her mother's heart would not allow her to send away any visitor or devotee without giving him or her some fruit or sweet. In this she was liberal to a fault. One day when she had thus used up everything, Gopal's Mother¹ cried out, 'My dear daughter-in-law, why have you not reserved anything for my Gopal!' The Mother hung her head in shame. Just then Navagopal Babu's wife alighted from a carriage and handed over to her some sweets and saved the situation. The Mother did not learn her lesson still, or perhaps it was impossible for her to change her nature. The Master too, knew of this extravagance, and just because he knew he argued with her one day in his room, 'How can it be managed if there is such extravagance?' At this the Mother quietly turned her back and walked away to the Nahabat. The Master now was in a quandary and said to his nephew, Ramlal, 'Hullo Ramlal, go and pacify your aunt. If she gets angry, everything will be undone with this (pointing to his body).' This was a voluntary defeat of the Master before the blossoming motherhood of Sarada Devi.

1. An old lady disciple of the Master, who worshipped Krishna in His form of a little child. At the end of her long practice she was blessed with a constant vision of the Divine Child whom she subsequently identified with the Master. The Mother thus became her daughter-in-law.

The Mother was one day recounting the memories of those old days to Yogin-Ma and others, when Yogin-Ma suddenly inquired why the Mother seemed to be so wilful in certain matters, even against the Master's advice. The Mother said with a smile, 'As for that, Yogen (Yogin-Ma), can any one obey another in everything?' And she added after a little reflection, 'Well, my dear, whatever you may say, I shan't be able to turn away anybody if he addresses me as Mother.'

One day, she made this abundantly clear to the Master himself. In this last incident there is not only an example of selfless service at its highest, but it is also full of the fragrance of motherhood in its first bloom. As the Mother felt too shy to come into the Master's room in the presence of others, the room was cleared of people at night to enable her to serve the Master his food. One night when she had just stepped on to the verandah of the Master's room, a woman devotee suddenly came up and snatched away the plate of food saying, 'Give it to me, Mother, give it to me!' The woman placed the plate before the Master and left as quickly. The Master sat down for his meal; the Mother too, sat by him. But he could not touch the food and said looking at the Mother, 'What's this you have done? Why did you give it into her hands? Don't you know her? She is immoral. How can I now eat what has been defiled by her?' 'I know all that,' said the Mother, 'but, do please take this tonight.' The Master would not still touch it, but at the Mother's importunity said, 'Promise that you won't hand it over to anybody else hereafter.' With folded hands the Mother replied, 'That I cannot, Master! I shall certainly bring your food myself, but if any one begs me by calling me "Mother", I shan't be able to contain myself. Besides, you are not my Master alone, you are for all.' That cheered up the Master and he began eating.

WHEN HEART CALLS HEART

We have followed the Mother's doings as she moved about busily within the precincts of the Nahabat contented with glimpses of the Master from afar. That self-content with her work and association with the Master was only one side of her life, and not a very important one. She lived at Dakshineswar only for serving the Master meticulously, any personal benefit being only incidental and never her main objective. If that were not so, her mind would some day or other revolt against the monotonous drudgery and the rigid routine of the Nahabat, and would search for an escape from it. The remedy was not quite beyond her reach; for at Dakshineswar itself, not far away, there was the house built by Shambhu Babu, and none at the temple premises could object seriously if she chose to relax herself a little from the shackles with which she voluntarily bound herself. But we are not concerned here with a discussion of the possible means of the Mother's personal happiness; we want to delineate the kinds of service that she rendered primarily to the Master, and incidentally to his devotees as well. With this side of her life we are already partly acquainted, and we shall get more evidence of it as we proceed. We shall confine our attention mainly to the period beginning with the coming of the devotees and ending with the final illness of the Master.

Prior to the Mother's arrival at Dakshineswar and her dedication to the service of the Master, life was rather uneventful with him. But when towards the end of his austerity his power of digestion suffered, the Mother came upon the scene as if through divine direction, Hridaya left the temple premises, and the Master's health improved as a result of the most devoted service of the Mother,—all these factors made the Master depend more and more on her. If she happened to go anywhere, the childlike Master felt helpless, and would become extremely

anxious to bring her back. Such solicitude on the part of one who was ever absorbed in spiritual experience, may appear enigmatic to many; but from the Mother's point of view we easily realize that her service was so successful that it could rivet on her the attention of the mightiest spiritual giant that history has witnessed. The Mother massaged the Master's feet even as does Lakshmi sitting at Lord Narayana's feet; before bath she rubbed oil on his person; and prepared nourishing and palatable dishes for him according to his taste and condition of health. In short, she then forgot herself in him. And it was not perhaps possible even for a detached mind like that of Sri Ramakrishna's to be oblivious of such consecrated service, instances of which, as also of the Master's dependence on her, are numerous.

The Master had a weak liver. So the Mother cooked for him soups and curries that were easily digestible. Now, according to Hindu custom, a wife may not do so during certain days when her person is considered impure. During those few days the Master ate whatever came to him as *prasada* from the Kali temple and suffered as a consequence. So he asked the Mother one day, 'Look here, dear, my trouble has increased because you did not cook my food during these days. Why didn't you do so?' The Mother explained, 'Women can't cook for anybody during the days of their impurity.' 'Who says, they can't?' asked the Master, 'Do it for me, you won't incur any sin thereby. Would you explain, which part of your body is impure—skin, flesh, bone, or marrow? Know that purity and impurity reside in the mind; there's nothing impure outside.' After that the Mother always cooked for him. The Master, highly delighted at this, said, 'See, my dear, how healthy is my body by taking your dishes.'

Another account of this service the devotees heard from the Mother. Once Kaviraj¹ Gangaprasad Sen of

1. A physician who treats in accordance with the old Indian system of medicines called Ayurveda or science of life.

Kumartoli, Calcutta, was called in to cure the Master of an ailment. The Kaviraj asked the patient to give up water altogether during the treatment. Childlike as the Master was, he went on asking everybody, 'Well, dear, shall I be able to manage without drinking water?' The Mother said to him encouragingly, 'Most assuredly you will.' Still the Master said, by way of caution, 'Water has to be wiped off even the pomegranate seeds. Try if you can.' The Mother assured him, 'Well, that depends on how Mother Kali will have it. By Her grace I shall try my utmost.' Then he resolved to give up water. The Mother offered him plenty of milk daily and increased the quantity gradually without his being aware of it. The milkman who came to the temple-garden gave her the extra milk left unsold, and said, 'If I leave the milk there, those people will carry it home after it has been offered to Kali, and will give it to all kinds of people; whereas, if I leave it here, he (the Master) will drink it.' In exchange he got from the Mother all kinds of sweets and other things that lay at hand. The devotees used to bring those things plentifully, and so there was no dearth. She then condensed the milk to two or three pints by boiling. When the Master asked her, 'How much milk is there?' she referred only to the thickened milk and said, 'How much, indeed? It may be two or two and a half pints.' Not convinced, the Master would say, 'No, why then is there that thick layer of cream?' The Mother nevertheless coaxed him to drink the whole quantity. One day Golap-Ma was present at the meal time and the Master asked her, 'Well, my dear, what is the quantity of milk there?' Golap-Ma, unaware of the purpose behind the question gave out the quantity of the unboiled milk. Startled at this, the Master said, 'Ah, such a lot of milk! That's why I get indigestion. Call her, call her!' The Mother came and the Master inquired again, 'How much is the milk?' The Mother gave her usual reply. But the Master persisted, 'Why then Golap does speak of there being so much?' Unabashed, the

Mother explained, 'Golap knows nothing. What does Golap know of our measurement here? How can Golap know how much a pot contains?' The matter ended there that day. But on another occasion the Master again inquired of Golap-Ma and she said, 'One bowlful of milk from here and another from the Kali temple.' The Master started and said, 'Ah, what a quantity! Call her; ask her.' As soon as the Mother entered, the Master inquired, 'How much milk does the bowl contain—how many quarts and pints?' The Mother replied, 'I know nothing of quarts or pints. Who indeed cares for so much calculation?' The Master pleaded, 'Can any one digest so much? As it is, I shall have indigestion.' And, in fact, he had it that afternoon, so that he had to forgo his evening meal. The Mother gave him only a cup of sago. Noticing the action of the Master's thoughts and beliefs on his body, fully established in truth as he was, Golap-Ma told the Mother regretfully, 'Mother, you ought to have warned me. For, his meal is spoiled.' The Mother explained, 'A white lie for feeding one has nothing bad in it. I feed him by cajoling him thus.' That is, to say, the Mother's attention was fixed not so much on formal veracity as on the improvement of the Master's health; and as a matter of fact, she found that he was putting on weight by drinking milk in plenty.

A word or two may be necessary by way of explanation for people who are wedded to a mere meticulous observance of conventional standards. When the Mother asked the Master not to be insistent about ascertaining the exact quantity of milk, she was, perhaps, following his own line of thought. Once the cashier of the temple paid the Master less than his monthly allowance through some mistake. When the Mother heard of it she suggested that it might be rectified by bringing it to the notice of that officer, at which the Master simply said, 'Bah! bah! To think that I should calculate!' In the present case too, the Mother, perhaps, wanted to defeat the Master through

his own psychological approach in order to make him drink the milk. Secondly, when we are discussing this topic, there flashes before our mind's eye the picture of a mother coaxing some dear, specially helpless, unthinking children, to take wholesome food. / What a lot of irrelevant talk and fanciful stories they indulge in for feeding their dear little ones! In such cases no one dares charge them with lying or prevarication, nor does such a preposterous idea cross the mind. And what is morality after all? There is nothing absolute about it. We pronounce something good after referring it to a certain background for a comparative study. The rose is not all good, it has its thorns. And yet the blooming flower with captivating fragrance and with dew drops on the soft petals that reflect the morning light, makes us oblivious of its drawbacks and thus leaves only a sweet memory which is ever a source of delight. The loving words of mothers and other dear ones too are only a source of comfort and happiness and their memory also is equally charming. The Holy Mother did not end with mere endearing words; she used to press the rice with her hands to make the quantity appear less, so that the mere sight of it might not scare the Master. So long as the Master's mother was alive, he used to go to her and eat his food sitting before her. But, later on, the food was carried to his room by the Mother.

Whatever the motive of the Holy Mother might have been, her devotion to the Master's service often came into conflict with his naturally high-toned morality and uncompromising practical veracity; for though the two hearts beat in unison, they had to express their feelings through complex human media. And yet such apparent disharmony produced certain remarkable situations which were full of deep import for others. We have noticed how the truthful Master suffered physically on coming to learn that he had been taking more milk than he thought he was actually doing, though as a matter of fact the diet had

been improving his health all the time. We adduce another instance of this kind. One day the Master saw that the pouch in which were kept for him some digestive spices to chew at will, was empty, and he went to the Mother to get some. The Mother handed over to him a pinch of aniseeds and *ajowan* (lovage, *ptychotis Coptica*) and gave him a little more in a packet of paper saying, 'Take this.' He took it and started for his room; but as a man of renunciation he had vowed not to stock anything for the future. Hence this slight infringement had an adverse effect on him. Some unknown force carried him to the southern Nahabat on the Ganges. Not finding the way to his room, but rather the river in full tide, he said, 'Mother, should I drown myself, should I?' That was in the early days of the Mother's life at Dakshineswar. She was in a predicament, for being extremely shy, she could not rush to his rescue, nor could she stand quiet. Just then a brahmin of the temple happened to pass that way, with whose help she called in Hridaya and had the Master taken to his room. We should ponder a little to realize how difficult it was to serve this god-man. While men have their own methods of being pleased, and the gods have their hymns and worship, in the case of God in human form such as was the Master it seemed as if only a divine woman like the Holy Mother could meet all his requirements.

Though the Mother made the service of the Master the one goal of her life, she did not deprive others of the privilege; on the contrary, when occasion demanded, she made way for others, though such forced separation from the Master meant insufferable desolation for her. She used to carry his food to his room at night. But once the Master asked Golap-Ma to do so. From that day on, the Mother entrusted Golap-Ma with the task. The Mother could hitherto meet the Master at least once in a day; but the new arrangement deprived her of that opportunity. Golap-Ma's nature was such that, though she was a spiritual soul of a high order and had intense devotion for

both the Master and the Mother, she could not understand the feelings of others but was led by her own sentiments, and this to such an extent that, even when she meant no harm but rather tried to do a good turn to others, she in fact hurt people's feelings. Once she said to the Mother, 'Mother, Manomohan's mother¹ was complaining: "He (the Master) is very ascetic, and yet the Mother wears these ear-rings and other ornaments. Does that look nice?"' Defeated by worldly wisdom, the Mother laid away that very day all her ornaments except a pair of bangles. When next day Yogin-Ma came and argued against such false sentimentality, she put on one or two pieces, but she never again wore all of them; for, soon after the Master developed cancer in his throat, so that her mind could no longer think of personal adornment. Be that as it may, let us return to the topic of serving food. Golap-Ma used to be with the Master long after evening, sometimes she returned to the Nahabat at ten o'clock. This caused much inconvenience to the Mother; for she had to keep watch over the food in the verandah of the Nahabat. One night the Master heard her saying, 'It doesn't matter if a cat or a dog eats the food; I can't go on watching it.' He realized the difficulty of the Mother and warned Golap-Ma. But she followed her own line of thought and said, 'No, Mother loves me very much and addresses me as she would her own daughter.' It was not strange, therefore, that it took a woman of her temperament quite a long time to understand the feelings of the Mother and to entrust the duty to her again. For this long period the Mother kept her misery all to herself, remaining content with the glimpses she had of him from afar.

Absolutely selfless though this extraordinary service was, not all could appreciate it. Not only that, but it gave

1. Manomohan Mitra and his mother were devotees of the Master. Rakhal married Manomohan's sister before he renounced the world and became Swami Brahmananda.

rise to jealousy in the hearts of worldlings, which at times found expression in words, and hence such ignorant criticism did not totally escape the Mother's ears. Once a woman asked her bluntly, 'Why do you go to the Master?' The innocent Holy Mother took others' words at their surface value; moreover she ever tried not to be a cause of annoyance to others. Thus with a view to composing others' minds, she often invited unnecessary mortification on herself, and this she bore without a murmur. In the present case she readily understood that the woman sought an opportunity of serving the Master, and accordingly she refrained from her part of the work for some time. Those were painful days, for she had then nothing more than fleeting glimpses of the Master as he passed at nightfall by her door on his way to the *jhau* (tamarisk) grove in the north; and at times that privilege too was denied.

Nonetheless, life at Dakshineswar rolled on merrily; but Fate would not however allow this. In June 1885, there were symptoms of the Master's throat trouble which the doctors later diagnosed as cancer. The devotees realized that the disease could not be treated properly unless he was removed to Calcutta where alone proper medical care would be available. The Master, having consented, was taken to a rented house in Durgacharan Mukherji Street, in the Baghbazar area of the city. But the sight of the house repelled the Master who left immediately for Balaram Babu's house; for being used to the open spaces of the temple-garden on the wide river, he could not be persuaded to squeeze himself into those dingy rooms. Within a week another house was rented in Shyampukur Street, and the Master took his residence there in the beginning of October.¹ He was placed under the care of the well-known Homoeopath, Dr. Mahendralal Sarkar.

1. The *Lilaprasanga Divyabhava* (p. 257) puts it as the beginning of September. But in the *Bengali Gospel of Shri Ramakrishna*, he is found to be present at Dakshineswar on the 24th September, and at Shyampukur on the 18th October. So we put it as the beginning of October 1885.

The Mother continued her desolate life at Dakshineswar. Sri Ramakrishna was not there, the opportunities of service had disappeared, and she was constantly put in mind of the evil prognostics the Master had made about his passing away. Four years before the cancer the Master had told her, 'When I eat indiscriminately from everybody's hand, spend the night in Calcutta, and partake of my food after offering part of it to someone, you will know that my last day is approaching.' Before the disease began, these omens had been coming true one by one. The Master had been going to various houses on invitation and partaking of all food except cooked rice served by all kinds of people; he had been spending nights now and then at Balaram Babu's house in Calcutta; and when Narendranath (Swami Vivekananda) once failed to visit Dakshineswar for a long time on account of some alimentary trouble, the Master had him brought there and made him partake of some portion of the soup and rice cooked for himself, the remaining portion of which he himself took afterwards. When the Mother objected and wanted to cook again, the Master said that he felt no hesitation in partaking of food of which a portion had been offered earlier to Narendra, and that the Mother need not apprehend any evil consequences or cook again. The Mother observed all this. But when the Divine Dispenser turns the wheel of fortune at His pleasure, others, though aware of the consequences and the remedy, can only watch and shed helpless tears. We can well realize how extremely forlorn the Mother felt at Dakshineswar when the Master was not there; we can understand that now and again the hard question was agitating her mind, 'Well, then, is he intent on ending his play here?' But who can believe an unpleasant truth? And even if there were no truth in the omens, what could she after all do in that helpless state? When the beloved disciples of the Master, with his own approval, made the arrangement for his cure, what else could the Mother do but silently smart under that ordeal. But her affliction was not to last long.

Soon after the Master was at Shyampukur, it became clear to the devotees that, side by side with medicines and personal attendance, there must be adequate arrangement for preparing diet. The young disciples could serve but not cook. And so the only way out of the difficulty was to bring the Mother there. But then, there was another insoluble problem. The house had no inner apartment for women; it really formed the outer apartment of a bigger house belonging to one Gokulchandra Bhattacharya. The devotees were at a loss to think how the Mother could live there; and remembering her preference for extreme seclusion, many doubted whether she would come at all. The Mother who avoided being seen by anybody in spite of her long residence at the Nahabat, could not be expected to get over this habit of privacy all of a sudden and live and move freely among men. And yet they had no alternative. Consequently the matter had to be put before the Master and his opinion sought. He too reminded them of the Mother's habit and said, 'Will she be able to come and live here? Anyway, you may try. If she agrees to come after knowing everything, let her do so.' The Master and his devotees based their misgivings on what they had known of the Holy Mother's temperament, but they forgot her wonderful power of adapting her life to the necessities of circumstances and her readiness to sacrifice all comfort and privacy for the sake of the Master. And as a matter of fact, as soon as the call came, she moved on to Shyampukur with alacrity and took up her duties there.

The house, No. 55, stands on the northern side of Shyampukur Street which stretches from east to west. As one entered the gate northward one found on either side a platform for sitting and a paved terrace. Further ahead on the right side were the stairs leading to the first floor and in front a courtyard, on the eastern side of which there were two or three small rooms. Going up, one found on the right a long room extending north and south, which was allotted to visitors. And on the left was the passage

leading to the rooms. The first door that one came across, as one proceeded along the passage, led to the big room in which the Master lived. It had verandas on north and south, and on the west two small rooms, one of which was the bedroom of the Holy Mother and the other of the devotees. On the eastern side of the passage to the Master's room was a staircase leading to the roof; and by the side of the door opening to the roof was a covered quadrangular terrace, where the Mother cooked for the Master and spent the whole day.

In that house there was only one place where bathing was possible and all had to bathe there. The Mother would finish her ablutions at three o'clock in the morning and go up the terrace on the second floor. When the diet for the Master was ready, she would send word downstairs through Gopal-dada (or Gopal-da) or Latu, and the visitors would then be asked to go out so that she might come down and feed the Master; or if that was not possible the young devotees would carry the food downstairs. The Mother would rest herself on the terrace at noon; and when all were asleep, she would come down to her own bedroom at about eleven o'clock at night. There she would sleep up to 2 a.m. This was her heavy and exacting routine for days on end in the service of the Master. But the wonder of it is that though hers was the most important part of the nursing, she carried on her work so silently in an unseen corner that not even the regular visitors suspected her presence.

After about two and a half months at Shyampukur, the doctor found that the Master's disease was increasing rather than decreasing, and he advised that he should be taken to some spacious garden house outside the city. Accordingly the devotees hired the premises No. 90, Cossipore Road, from Gopalchandra Ghosh; and the Master, along with the Mother and the young disciples, shifted there on the 11th December, 1885. The garden house lay on the eastern side of the Cossipore Road which runs northward from Calcutta. Almost at the middle of the northern boundary wall of the garden there were some three or four

small rooms meant as kitchen and store. In front of these, on the other side of the garden path, stood a two-storeyed dwelling house which had four rooms on the ground floor and two upstairs. Of the lower rooms, the one in the middle was like a hall. North of this were two small rooms side by side, the western one of which had a wooden staircase leading up to the rooms above, and the eastern one was the Mother's bedroom. The big hall, which extended east and west, and the room on the south of it, which had a small verandah on the east, were used by the devotees as bedrooms and sitting rooms. Over the hall there was another big room of equal dimensions, where the Master lived. South of this was an open terrace with a parapet all around where the Master sometimes sat or strolled. North of this was the roof over the stairs, and a room over the Mother's of equal size which was used for the Master's convenience or as a bedroom for some young devotees on duty.

Needless to say that the Mother felt more happy here inasmuch as she could serve the Master while not being hampered by as many constraints as before. The young devotees too continued to attend on the Master, and their number gradually swelled. Thus the malady of the Master became an occasion for the crystallization of the future Ramakrishna Order, at the centre of which naturally sat the Holy Mother as the presiding deity. Here, too, her daily routine remained almost the same; the slight changes that were made were for making it more convenient for the Master. Here also she cooked the usual things. If any special diet had to be prepared, Gopal-da or some one else with whom she could talk freely learnt the process from the physician and duly instructed her. A little before noon and a short while after evening, she carried the food to the Master and returned to her own room when his meal was over. At this time Lakshmi Devi was brought there to help her in the work and keep company. Besides, the women devotees who came to visit the Master, spent some time or lived with the Mother for a day or two. It is not known exactly

when Lakshmi Devi came there; it is also doubtful if the women devotees visited the Master frequently enough or if they stayed for any considerable period. The following incidents rather go to show that usually the Mother had no one to assist her even in an emergency.

The distance between successive steps of the wooden staircase mentioned earlier was so great that it required some effort even for healthy people to negotiate the ascent, while for weaker people it was a task. One day as the Mother was going up with a bowl containing four pints of milk, her head reeled and she fell down, thus spilling the milk and spraining her ankle. Stunned by the fall she lay on the ground; then Baburam (Swami Premananda) who happened to be there, lifted her up. The ankle became swollen, making it impossible for her to climb the steps. The Master was pained to hear of the mishap; moreover as he depended on her for many things, he became not a little nervous. But he was always noted for his good humour, so that his anxiety and sympathy found expression in words that made the young devotees forget their sorrow for the time being. He started by saying to Baburam, 'Now that matters have come to such a pass, Baburam, what will turn up next? What about my food? Who will feed me?' The Master was then given rice paste to eat, and the Mother cooked and fed him with it. She wore a big nose-ring (*nath*) at that time. Hence the Master put his hand to his nose and circling a finger round in imitation of the ring, told Baburam with a gesture: 'O Baburam, can you carry in a basket on your head that person who is such and such?' That made Narendra and Baburam laugh until their sides almost split. Three days later, when the swelling on the ankle had subsided a little, the young devotees helped her to limp up the steps; during these three days Golap-Ma, who was brought there for the purpose, prepared the rice paste and fed the Master; for the Master did not accept cooked rice from any non-brahmin.

When the Master was completely bed-ridden at Cossipore, the young devotees on attendance planned one evening to drink the juice collected in an earthen pitcher by tapping a date palm at the southern boundary of the garden. The Master knew nothing of this. At the appointed hour, Niranjana (Swami Niranjanananda) and others proceeded towards the tree in a group. Just then the Mother suddenly noticed the Master darting down like an arrow. Startled at this, she thought, 'Is that possible at all? How can one, who has to be helped even to change sides on his bed, rush down like that?' And yet she could not totally disbelieve her eyes. Accordingly she had to go to his room to be sure of the matter; but he was not there, the room was empty. In great consternation she searched for him here and there, but failing to find him, went to her own room with extreme confusion and apprehension in her mind. After a while she saw him darting up as swiftly as he had gone down. To satisfy her curiosity she asked the Master about it later and he said, 'Did you indeed notice that? The boys who have come here are all young. They were proceeding merrily to drink the juice of a date palm in the garden. I saw that there was a black cobra there which is so ferocious that it would have bitten them all. The boys did not know this. So I went there by a different route to drive it away; and I told it, "Don't enter here again." ' He warned her not to divulge this to others. The Mother was overwhelmed by these happenings.

From a minor incident we can have an idea of how respectfully the young devotees looked on the Mother even in those early days. The Master once said to them, 'I have a desire to eat the food you get by begging.' At this Narendra and others leaped with joy. But before they started on their mission they decided that the first person to be approached should be the Holy Mother. And when they begged her, she dropped full sixteen annas,¹ into their begging pot. Thus in every

1. Sixteen annas make one rupee and the full moon is supposed.

undertaking they sought her blessing; and she, too, had the sweetest and kindest of words for them. If the young men became upset at the continuous emaciation of the Master's body, it was she who consoled and encouraged them, and when any problem about the Master's service cropped up, her advice helped them to solve it. In fact, behind everything there were the loving, spoken words, the blissful, unseen hands of the Holy Mother which put life into every heart.

SILENT PREPARATION

We have given many illustrations to show how courageously the Mother freed herself from conventions and prejudices when duty or occasion demanded it. Such changes often resulted from the advice of the Master, but quite as often the Mother spontaneously made the necessary adjustments; for the single aim of her life was to please the Master. But these remarks relate only to matters of daily routine. In regard to the higher life, the two souls were so similarly attuned that even independent of each other they produced but the same charming strains; in that field the Mother had no effort to make and the Master had no direction to give. This side of their lives has also been partially depicted. Now we shall relate some incidents not discussed earlier.

A great Vaishnava festival, called the Danda-mahotsava, is held at Panihati on the eastern bank of the Ganges, a few miles above Calcutta, every year in the month of Jyeshtha (May-June). The festival for the year 1885 was near at hand. The Master had taken part in it several times before he had any 'English-educated' devotees at Dakshineswar, but latterly he had not gone there. In 1885 the Master told a group of his devotees, 'The festival will be a mart of divine joy and you will find the Lord's name bandied about freely. You "young Bengal" have never witnessed such a thing. Let us all go along and see this.' Accordingly twenty-five devotees reached Dakshineswar in two hired boats at about nine o'clock on the morning of the festive day. A third boat lay anchored in the stream for the Master. Some women devotees reached earlier in the morning for preparing food and all got ready to start at ten. After the Master had finished his meal, the Mother inquired through a woman devotee, whether she too might join the party. The Master told the devotee, 'If she wants to, she may.' Hearing the Master's words, the Holy Mother said to the devotee, 'Quite a number of persons are

going with him; besides, the place will be filled with people. It will be difficult for me in that great crowd to get down from the boat and see the festival. So I won't go.' The women devotees took leave of her and got into the Master's boat and left for Panihati. When the Master's boat returned from the festival at 8-30 p.m., the women devotees decided to spend the night with the Mother; and then coming to learn that on the ensuing full moon day there would be elaborate worship and much merriment in commemoration of the consecration of the Kali temple, they decided to stay on till then. When the Master sat down for his supper that night, he said to one of the women, 'It was so crowded; moreover, all had their eyes riveted on me because of my divine inebriation; she (Mother) did well not to come with us. If people had seen her by my side, they would have said, "A pair of swans¹ has come!" She is very intelligent.' When the women reported this to the Mother, she said, 'From the way he gave me leave to go in your party in the morning, I knew that it was not a hearty permission. If he had wanted me to go, he would have said, "Yes, surely she can come too." When without doing so he left the decision to me with the remark, "If she wants to, she also may," I decided that I had better give up the idea.'

The Master that night told the women of another instance of her intelligence: 'When the Marwari devotee (Lakshminarayana) proposed to give me ten thousand rupees, I felt as though my head was under a saw. I said to Mother (Kali), "Mother, Mother, dost Thou come to tempt me again after so long a time?" At that time I called her (Holy Mother) to test her mind and said, "Listen, my dear, this man proposes to give me money. As I have refused the offer, he proposes to give it to you. Why don't you accept this?" At this she replied instantaneously, "How

1. *Hamsa-Hamsi* in Bengali. Hamsa means both swan and soul. The word Parama-hamsa means a great soul, and is applied to the world-renouncing monks like Paramahansa Ramakrishna. Hence *hamsa-hamsi* means, by a pun, Ramakrishna and his wife.

can that be? The money can't be accepted. If I receive it, it will be as good as your receiving it; for if I take it, I shall spend it on you; and hence it will amount to your own acceptance. People respect you for your renunciation; therefore the money can never be accepted." At these words of hers I felt intensely relieved.'

It was not only in worldly affairs that these two hearts beat in unison, in spiritual matters too the Mother kept in step with the Master. During the Shodashi worship we had a visual demonstration of the essential identity of their outlook. In the Nahabat and in the Shyampukur house we were struck with wonder by a glimpse of the Mother's self-effacement in the service of her husband, exhibiting spiritual discipline of the highest order. Not content with all this, the Mother converted her whole life into a series of austerity in the same way as the Master did. Now, any intense religious pursuit is supernormal, and specially so was it in the case of the Mother. Hence if we study this phase of her life from a mere normal point of view, the reader may well ask: 'What are you about? At the end of the Shodashi worship, the Mother had received as a free gift from the Master all the fruits of his own long spiritual discipline. Her disposition was naturally so sweet and charming, that even if she had had no background of austerity, she could not have failed to impress others; and her physical suffering and strenuous life were in themselves a telling example of great spiritual striving. Is not a life that comprises all these at their best, already established in the highest state that a human being can aspire to? Is it not then unreasonable to say that spiritual progress is dependent on a formal course of discipline as prescribed by the scriptures? What indeed are you aiming at?' But we reply, 'Let us not lose our patience. As impartial biographers, we shall state all the facts in the life of this unique character; it is not our function to judge their worth or interpret their purpose; the readers, both of the present and of future generations,

may attempt that task. But we feel sure that no effort of a divine woman like the Mother is wholly without meaning. Such an effort flows from a fullness of heart rather than from social need or impulsion. Because of this, each of her acts has a natural splendour and a novelty, which though not obvious to modern minds make them worthy of being recorded. Unfortunately most of the incidents of her silent discipline have fallen into oblivion or are only imperfectly known. For instance, the Mother undertook a vow (perhaps on the 20th May, 1883) called the *Savitri-vrata*, which is mentioned in the notes of Swami Saradananda and the memoirs of Master Mahashaya, but of which we know nothing apart from these casual references. Yet such hints are invaluable in reconstructing our picture of that unknown side of the Mother's life.'

A living touch with spirituality comes through association with those who actually tread the path. The Mother lived virtually in the centre of a spiritual concourse at Dakshineswar, and the lessons she imbibed were many. Not to mention the hundreds of ardent and advanced devotees who gathered round the Master, there was a constant stream of adepts and aspirants, both men and women, who stopped at Dakshineswar on their way to Gangasagar and Puri. About most of these we know next to nothing. And about the other well-known personalities who have been dealt with more fully in other books, we may keep silent. We have referred to the Bhairavi Brahmani, one chapter of whose life became closely linked with that of the Mother. There is mention of another Bhairavi¹ too. One day the Master said to the Mother, 'A Bhairavi will come today. Get a piece of cloth suitably dyed; we shall give it to her.' That Bhairavi came that day after the worship at the Kali temple was over, and entered into a long conversation with the Master.

1. Bhairava is an aspect of Siva. In dress and outer appearance he is terrible; but he is also a protector of the supplicant. Bhairavas and Bhairavis are mendicants who follow his cult.

She then stayed on at Dakshineswar for some days. She was somewhat hot-tempered. She not only took on herself the duty of protecting the Mother, but also warned her, 'Do thou keep ready for me some rice soaked in water overnight; if thou dost not, I shall leave thee dead here by piercing thee with my trident.' The Mother was terrified at this; but the Master said, 'Don't you be afraid. She is a real Bhairavi and hence her temper is a little high!' On some days the Bhairavi obtained so much by begging that it lasted her for a week or more. The chief officer of the temple said to her, 'Mother, why should you go out for begging? You can get it all here.' The Bhairavi replied, 'You are my uncle Kalanemi¹! How can one depend on your words?'

When the Mother and Lakshmi Devi lived together at the Nahabat, the Master on his way to the northern *jhau* grove in the small hours of the night would wake them up saying, 'Get up, O Lakshmi, get up. Awaken your aunt. How much longer will you sleep? It's nearly morning now. Wash your face with Ganges water and call on the Mother (Kali); begin your *japa* and meditation.' If the Mother and Lakshmi Devi were already awake, they would leave their beds at once. But in winter, even though the Master called, the Holy Mother, with a view perhaps to ensuring a longer period of sleep for Lakshmi Devi, would say in an undertone, 'Do you keep silent! His eyes are sleepless. It's not as yet time to get up; the birds aren't chirping as yet. Don't you respond!' If the Master got no response or had reason to think that they did not wake up, he would, out of fun, pour water over the door-sill; and they jumped up for fear of the beds on the floor getting wet; sometimes their beds did thus get actually wet. As a result of this, Lakshmi Devi became an early riser. The Mother, of course, was always an early riser.

One day the Master wanted to test the Mother's capacity to appreciate his deep spiritual moods. That day he

1. Maternal uncle of Ravana.

asked Mother to prepare betel rolls, tidy up his bed, and sweep the floor; and then he proceeded to the Kali temple to prostrate himself before the goddess. The Holy Mother had nearly finished her work when the Master entered the room unnoticed, with red eyes, staggering gait, and fuddled speech like those of a man in a state of intoxication. The Mother was so engrossed in her work that she did not notice him even though he came within reach. Then he suddenly pushed her from behind and said, 'Hullo, my dear, have I drunk wine!' Though the Mother was taken aback by this unexpected sight, she promptly replied, 'No, no, why should you be under wine?' 'Why do I then wobble?' argued the Master. 'Why am I fuddled in speech? Am I tipsy?' In haste the Mother replied, 'No, no, why should you have drunk wine? You have drunk of the nectar of Mother Kali's love?' Highly delighted, the Master said, 'You have spoken rightly indeed!'

Sometimes the Master imparted to her high spiritual truths. Once after relating the life of Sri Krishna to the Mother and Lakshmi Devi, he said to the latter, 'You both should discuss between yourselves what you have heard from me. What the cattle eat in the day, they chew over again at night. If you and your aunt discuss these incidents in Krishna's life, you will not forget them. You will remember them well.' Another day he drew for the Holy Mother on paper a diagram of the six plexuses¹ to illustrate the lessons he was giving her on yoga.

The Master knew that the Mother loved his *kirtana*; and accordingly, before the music began he asked his nephew Ramlal to keep open the northern door of his room, saying, 'Should they not witness the divine afflatus and spiritual moods that will find expression here? Should

1. Much later, when the Mother was asked about it, she replied quite innocently, 'Ah, my dear, could I imagine that events would take such a big turn! That thing was mislaid and I couldn't trace it.' We must remember that during the Master's illness and after, the Mother was in such great trouble that she could not take care of her personal belongings.

they not hear. (the *kirtana*)? How will they learn else?' They watched through a hole in the screen of plaited bamboo strips. As this hole gradually became bigger, the Master noticed it and remarked humorously, 'Hullo Ramlal, your aunt's screen there has got a split, it seems.' Unable to appreciate the Master's joke, Ramlal replied that the Master alone was to blame for that unwelcome development; for while Ramlal wanted to keep the northern door closed, the Master directed otherwise.

The Mother once learnt an occult formula for curing certain diseases. The Master coming to know of this, asked her to surrender it at the feet of her chosen deity, so that her spiritual life might be absolutely pure. She related the incident to Yogin-Ma when the latter got into an imbroglio, in the Master's presence, on that very score. It was like this. One day, when the Master had rinsed his mouth with the water poured by Yogin-Ma on his palm, he suddenly turned to her and said, 'Hullo, my dear, I have a pain in my throat. Please utter the *mantra* that you know for its cure and pass your hand over the affected part.' Yogin-Ma did as the Master directed. Then she came to the Mother and said, 'How did he know that I had this formula?' At this the Mother replied with a smile, 'Well, dear, he knows everything, and yet he does not hate any one for what one does with sincerity of purpose. You need not have any fear. I too learnt that *mantra* before I came to him. When I told him of it after coming here, he said, "There's no harm in it. Now you lay it down at the feet of your chosen deity."'

He looked after the Mother with very great care. About this the Mother herself said, 'When I was at the Nahabat, the Master forbade even Ramlal to meet me though he was my nephew.' One morning at nine o'clock, Hriday went to the Nahabat to give the Mother and Lakshmi Devi the fruits and sweets offered in the temples, and spent some time in talking and laughing aloud with them. After his return, the Master reproached him saying

‘You shall return soon after handing over such things. I warn you not to tarry any longer in future.’¹

In addition to this kind of direct training, instruction, and preservation of a suitable atmosphere for her inner unfolding he also encouraged her in all her voluntary endeavours. The Mother could sing well. One night she and Lakshmi Devi, while singing in a low tone a religious song of a high spiritual order, became absorbed in its soul-enthraling appeal. The Master heard them and told the Mother the next day, ‘You were much enraptured by that song yesterday. Well, that was very fine!’ Another afternoon the Mother collected some jasmine and red *rangan* (*ixora coccinea* or *purviflora*) buds with which she strung a fine stout garland and then put it in a bowl of water for the petals to open out. Then she sent it for being put round Kali’s neck, which was done soon after the Master arrived at the temple, and he was so charmed by the beauty that he kept on repeating: ‘Ah! How fine it looks against the black colour (of Kali)!’ When on inquiry he learnt that it was strung by the Holy Mother, he said, ‘Ah! Have her brought here once. Let her see how beautiful the Mother (Kali) looks with this garland on.’ Coming there with the maid-servant Brinde, she found Balaram Babu, Surendra Babu and others going to the temple. So through her shyness she hid herself behind the hem of the maid-servant’s garment and proceeded to climb to the high basement of the temple by the steps at the rear. At this the Master called out, ‘Don’t you climb up that

1. Bengali society, in those days, did not allow high-born women to leave the inner apartments or talk and sing loudly. That was a matter of propriety and family honour. The Master was here showing his respect for the local custom. Similarly, when at Kamarpukur a big hole wide as a window was made in the bedroom wall, he ordered it be closed at once, since it opened on the public road behind. But the same Master asked the Holy Mother to walk from Dakshineswar to Calcutta to see the ailing wife of Balaram Babu; and at another time sent two ladies to the market place to buy some vegetables. Besides, he arranged for the Mother’s literary education. He came to fulfil and not to destroy.

side, my dear. The other day a fisherwoman slipped down, when going up that side and died. Why don't you come up by the front steps?' Hearing this, Balaram Babu and others moved away, and the Mother had a hearty look at Kali from the front door.

The Holy Mother and Lakshmi Devi received the sacred *mantra*¹ of Sakti² from an up-country sannyasin named Purnananda, who was stout, fine in appearance, and quiet in temperament, and who happened to be then at Kamarpukur. Later on, when the Mother was at Dakshineswar, the Master wrote something on her tongue, which process is a well-known form of higher initiation. Next day the Mother said to Lakshmi Devi, 'He wrote on my tongue yesterday. Why don't you also approach him?' Some time thereafter the Master wrote on Lakshmi Devi's tongue the secret letter (*Bija*, lit., seed) of Radha and Krishna, and even though he was told that Lakshmi had previously got the Sakti *mantra*, he said, 'Let that be so; I have given her the true *mantra*.'

The Mother left her bed every morning at three o'clock and sat in meditation facing south on the western verandah of the Nahabat. This was almost a rule with her. But one night she felt a little out of sorts and was late in getting up; and this lethargy continued for some days, nay, the time of leaving the bed began to be further put off, till the Mother realized that if one means to do a thing properly, one must have intense earnestness and must apply oneself heart and soul to it. And so she never faltered

1. A *mantra* for *japa* consists of two parts, the seed (*Bija*) or the special secret letter of the particular deity and a very small prayer or salutation in Sanskrit to the deity concerned. The initiated disciple goes on repeating this *mantra* at stated hours of the day. The number of repetitions varies according to circumstances, but a thousand or two thousand repetitions are quite common.

2. Literally means power, God conceived as an expression of energy, in all planes of existence—physical, vital, mental, moral and spiritual. Kali, and others are particular manifestations of this Sakti.

again. The number of times she made *japa* of her *mantra* was very great. One day she told her niece Nalini in the course of a talk, 'What a lot of a work I did when I was of your age! And yet, in spite of all that work, I repeated my *mantra* a hundred thousand times.' Along with such meditation and *japa*, there went on in her mind a constant prayer. When the moon appeared in the sky at night and was reflected on the placid waters of the Ganges, she prayed to God with wet eyes, 'Even the moon has its spots—may my mind have no spot at all.'

Through the practice of meditation, her mind, which was naturally turned inward, became fully concentrated even in those early days. She herself said, 'One has to be up and doing; can anything be achieved without diligence? One should find some time even in the midst of domestic duties. What to speak of myself, my child! I used to begin my *japa* in those days at Dakshineswar after leaving the bed at three in the morning, and lose all consciousness. One night, when all was absolutely calm around, I sat for *japa* near the steps of the Nahabat. I did not know at all when the Master went to the tamarisk grove (as he used to do every night at that time). On other nights I used to hear the sound of his slippers. I was deep in meditation. My appearance was not like this then¹—I had ornaments and a cloth with a red border. The end of the cloth covering the upper part of my body was being blown down; still I was not conscious of it. Boy Yogen (Swami Yogananda), who came with a waterpot for the Master, found me in that state. My daughter, what fine days those were! On moonlit nights I looked up at the moon and prayed with folded hands "Make my heart as white as your rays!" Ah! What a mind I had then! The maid-servant, Brinde, one day (pushed and) set rolling a plate of bell-metal before me, the sound of which seemed to pierce my heart.' The Mother's mind was

1. She said on another occasion, 'Do you think my complexion was like this before? I was very beautiful at one time. At first I was not very stout; then (after the Master's passing away) I became so.'

then so deeply concentrated that the jarring sound shocked her like a thunder peal.

As her own mind began to be more concentrated through meditation and *japa* and as she noticed the deepening of the spiritual emotions in others, the desire grew in her to have something of their inebriation. Particularly was she impressed by the devotional fervour and emotional outbursts in the life of Gauri-Ma. So she conveyed her request for this to the Master through Lakshmi Devi. But the Master dismissed the idea saying, 'She (Gauri-Ma) is a girl of Kalighat; she can withstand all that.¹ Women, who are naturally mild and weak, prosper and succeed through softness. Women should be meek and sober; modesty is their forte; otherwise there will be public calumny.'

The Mother often had her moods of rapt absorption, but we do not know whether along with that self-forgetfulness there was any external expression known to herself or others. It would seem, however, that even if there was such a manifestation, she was not aware of it or it was not as overflowing as Gauri-Ma's. Perhaps such exuberance of spiritual ecstasy was kept in check because of the Master's condemnation of it. But for one who would in future become the consoler, guide, and inspirer of many in her aspects of mother, teacher and divinity, there was need for manifestation, though in a secret recess, of that higher type of emotion through which alone common men can measure spiritual heights. So that the desire was not suppressed for ever in the Mother's heart, but it cropped up again; and God, too, it seems, realized that the time was opportune for revealing her spiritual power for the fulfilment of her life's mission; and therefore it is that we find the Mother commissioning Yogin-Ma again with these words: 'Pray to him, so that I have a little of spiritual ecstasy. I don't get the

1. Kalighat is the quarter where the well-known Kali temple in south Calcutta stands. Pilgrims visit the place in large numbers, and many girls of the priestly families become extrovert by frequent contacts with such strangers and by being worshipped by them as emblems of Sakti.

opportunity of telling him, because he is always surrounded by people.' Yogin-Ma, in her innocence, took these words at their face value; she could not imagine that no mediator was really necessary for giving concrete shape on the physical plane to the strong, though unseen, spiritual line of communication that subsisted between these two souls; nor could she realize that even from her childhood the Mother's mind was so high-strung that, though others might be unaware, she was ever in the presence of the Lord. Yogin-Ma simply thought, 'It may be so, since the Mother wants this, I shall tell the Master.' Next morning she found the Master sitting alone on his cot and broached the subject. The Master heard her but kept silent. As no one dared talk to him when he was in such a mood, Yogin-Ma prostrated herself before him again and left the room silently.

When she returned, the Mother was engaged in her daily worship, and the door was ajar. Through the opening she noticed the Mother laughing—laughing and then again weeping by turns—while tears flowed down profusely. After passing a while in this way she became quite silent, merged in *samadhi*. Yogin-Ma, then shut the door and walked away. When she returned there after some time, the Mother asked her, 'Are you just come (from the Master)?' Yogin-Ma now got an opportunity for twitting the Mother for sending her on a useless errand and said, 'How so, Mother? Didn't you say you didn't have spiritual ecstasies?' The Mother smiled bashfully to cover up the exposure.

At times Yogin-Ma spent a night with the Mother. She preferred to have a separate bed; but the Mother drew her to herself, so that they both shared the same bed. One night somebody was playing on a flute. The Mother was in the grip of a spiritual mood produced by that music, and she sat up and began laughing by fits and starts. Yogin-Ma, too, sat up and withdrew herself to one corner of the bed thinking, 'I am a householder; I should not touch her now.' The Mother came round after a long time.

ON THE COMMISSION

Gradually it became clear after the Mother's arrival at Dakshineswar that the Master, by imparting transcendental as well as secular wisdom, by deepening her life of divine aspiration, and awakening her dormant power of spiritual ministration, was preparing her for taking up and fulfilling the mission that had just commenced in his own life. We have read of the invocation of the deity at the Shodashi worship, when the Mother received the adoration of the great awakened soul and became conscious of her own divinity, though she did not even then decide whether or not to take up what was to be her life's work. Moreover, that worship took place at dead of night in a closed room. The people probably heard of this long afterwards, but they could not grasp its full import. Now came the time for a clearer call to the Mother to enter into her own domain and to bear witness before the devotees as to her real stature. And hence we find that during the closing years of the Master's life, his work in this field followed a well-defined course. He had been trying to arouse her sub-conscious potentiality through veneration, adoration, and direct references to her divinity. He had been equipping her mind for her future task of guiding spiritual aspirants by teaching her various powerful *mantras*, pulsating with the life he had breathed into them through his own experiments with them, and telling her of the levels of life for which each *mantra* was suitable. And he had been creating a field for the expression of her motherhood and vivifying it by introducing his devotees to her and telling her how to deal with them. And as a last step he invited her off and on, in no uncertain terms, to co-operate in the task willingly and at the same time he apprised the devotees of the course of future development. We shall now proceed to a study of these events.

Before we do so, however, we must be careful about one thing; we must not commit the blunder of thinking that the Holy Mother's present-day glory is entirely due to the Master's training and endeavour. It is a basic truth of the art of teaching that unless a student has some latent powers of a very special or high order, the best teacher and the most valuable instruction cannot make him surpass the ordinary run of mankind. And along with those powers is necessary the willing and eager co-operation of the taught. But the Mother was willing even in those early Dakshineswar days to make the Master's effort a success, just as the Master, fully cognizant of her essential divinity, was extremely eager to make her begin her mission.

The Master one day told Golap-Ma, 'She (Mother) is Sarada, Saraswati¹; she has come to impart knowledge. She has descended by covering up her beauty this time, lest unregenerate people should come to grief by looking at her with impure eyes.' On another occasion he said, 'She is the communicator of knowledge, she is full of the rarest wisdom. Is she of the common run? She is my Sakti (power).' And to his nephew Hriday, he said, 'My dear, her name is Sarada, she is Saraswati. That's why she likes to put on ornaments.' The reader may have in mind that when the Holy Mother came to her father-in-law's house as a child and began crying at the sight of her person denuded of ornaments, Chandramani Devi, mother of Sri Ramakrishna, placed her on her lap and consoled her saying that Ramakrishna would adorn her afterwards. The Master had that scene ever before his eyes, and accordingly told Hriday, 'Just see how much money you have in your safe. Have a pair of gold armlets made for her.' The Master was then ill; still he ordered those armlets to be made at a cost of three hundred rupees. But the actual

1. Sarada means Saraswati, the mythological goddess of Learning; and etymologically Sarada means 'the giver of sara or essence', i.e., knowledge of Brahman.

cost came up to two hundred rupees only, and so the balance was paid to the Mother in cash. When the Master had been going through his austerity in the early days, he had a vision of Sita at Panchavati when he noticed that her bracelets had diamonds cut on their surface; hence he had such bracelets too, made for the Mother¹; and then he humorously remarked, "That's my relationship with her."

It was not easy to recognize the Mother, behind her rural simplicity, lack of modern culture, and absence of pelf and power. Sri Ramakrishna himself knew that the modern world, rolling in wealth and steeped in enjoyment, could not easily appreciate a character that was made up of the purest material and had nothing of the flash and flourish which appeal to a modern mind; and hence he spoke about the Mother in fun, 'She is a cat under ashes.' As the true colour of a cat covered with ashes escapes the notice of a careless observer, so also does the true stature of the Holy Mother elude the ken of ordinary men. Swami Premananda wrote about her in a letter: 'Who has understood the Holy Mother? There's not a trace of grandeur. The Master had at least his power of *vidya* (knowledge) manifested, but the Mother?—her perfection of knowledge is hidden. What a mighty power is this! Glory to the Mother! Glory to the Mother! Glory to the powerful Mother! A poison that we can't assimilate we pass on to the Mother. She draws everyone to her lap. An infinite power—an incomparable grace! Glory to the Mother! Not to speak of us; we haven't seen the Master himself doing this. With how much caution and what testing he accepted any one! And here—what do you see here at

1. Yogin-Ma says, 'At that time the Mother lived at the Nahabat like the most revered Sita. She wore a piece of cloth with broad red borders, and vermilion at the parting of her hair. Her thick black tresses almost touched her knees. She wore a gold necklace, a big nose-ring, ear-rings, and bracelets, those which Mathur Babu gave the Master when he took to spiritual practice by assuming the role of a handmaid to the Divine Mother.'

the Mother's place? Wonderful! Wonderful! She grants shelter to everyone, eats food from the hands of almost any one, and all is digested! Mother, Mother, victory unto the Mother!' And the world-renowned Swami Vivekananda wrote: 'Brother, I shall demonstrate the worship of the living Durga, and then shall my name be true...Brother, I tell you, I am a fanatic in this matter. Of Ramakrishna Paramahansa, you may assert that he was God, man, or whatever you like; but fie on him who is not devoted to the Mother.' When we read such invaluable appreciations, our pen suddenly stops and in bewilderment we ask ourselves, 'Are we not engaged in a task entirely beyond us?' And yet once we are in it, we have to proceed with the Mother's grace as our only strength.

Before proclaiming the divinity of the Holy Mother at Dakshineswar, the Master hinted at it at Kamarpukur, though the uneducated and uncultured village women did not, perhaps, comprehend her greatness. The Mother was then a mere girl of fourteen. When the Master talked to the village women of higher things, the Mother often fell asleep. The others then tried to wake her up and said, 'What a pity; she misses these fine things! She has fallen asleep!' But the Master said, 'No, my dear, no; don't awaken her. Don't think she is asleep without reason. If she hears these things, she will fly headlong away.' The women later reported this to the Mother. The Master alone knew what he exactly meant by those words. Probably, he wanted to convey the idea that the Mother's mind had such an innate repugnance for this world and was ever so attracted towards transcendental verities, that if she became engulfed in such high thoughts before an adequate environment was ready for the divine part she was destined to play, the very purpose of her birth in this world of ours would be frustrated.

Howsoever that might have been, this much will suffice for the present as an introduction to the comprehension of her divinity. As we proceed further in the

delineation of this unique personality we shall find that though her character evolved wonderfully amidst strange surroundings, it reached perfection in one particular field. Though she was divine, the world has seen in her an all-loving Mother. This is a very important phenomenon in human history. In the *Srirama-purva-tapani Upanishad* (verse 7) it is said, 'For fulfilling the purpose of the aspirants, the formless Brahman assumes forms.' In the *Gita* (IV.11) Sri Krishna declares, 'In whatsoever way men approach me, even so I reward them.' And in the *Chandī* (XII.35) the Rishi (Seer) says, 'O King, that Divine Mother, though birthless, yet manifests Herself again and again for the protection of the world.' And hence from time immemorial men, particularly Indians, have been worshipping Her in diverse symbols and images. Her hymns and songs too, are innumerable. She is with us under various guises and in multifarious forms. She bestows wealth and wisdom. She removes ailments and grants health, and She affords us protection and kills our enemies. When pleased, She grants faith, devotion, and even emancipation; but when offended She liquidates the sin and the sinner. We have been adoring Her from time of yore in Her aspects as women, as sources of inspiration, as divinity, or as mothers. Drawn by the devotion of mortals She comes down now and again. We meet Her in the person of a Sati, Sita, Radha, or Andal¹. A pathetic cry from a helpless child like the poet-mystic Ramprasad makes Her leave the heavenly throne and come down as a small girl to help the devotee in mending his dilapidated fence. In the forms of daughters and mothers She consoles Her devotees in their trials and tribulations. Men have thus established the sweetest of relationships with the Transcendental Entity. And yet the Devi still remained

1. Sati and Sita were consorts of Siva and Ramachandra respectively; and both of them were noted for their unparalleled devotion to their husbands, Bhu-devi, consort of Vishnu incarnated in South India as Andal (or Kodai), illustrating the *madhur bhava* (looking upon God as one's nayaka or husband).

in Her lofty aloofness as ever. In spite of brief appearances for granting the desires of particular devotees, or Her descent with the Lord as Sita or Radha, She did not incarnate fully as the Universal Mother for bringing about a world regeneration through Her personal endeavour. In the life of the Holy Mother we arrive at the culmination of this line of descent. The deity here is fully recognized as a living human personality receiving the worship of Sri Ramakrishna and being identified by him with Mother Kali in the temple and his mother Chandramani Devi in the Nahabat.

Why did man want the Devi in this particular form and why did She grant the prayer? We have stated that unless the Devi incarnated as the Mother, there would ever have remained a gap in the spiritual world. Man comprehends higher and newer truths in terms of what he already knows. The mother holds the child in her womb and suckles it after its birth. On opening the eyes, the child finds the mother as a sure and the most unique source of all affection, nourishment, happiness, beauty and security. In the field of spiritual striving, too, the aspirant wants to visualize the Deity as the embodiment par excellence of all those fine human relationships. Sri Ramakrishna said, 'The attitude of looking on God as Mother is the highest form of spiritual discipline.' Swami Vivekananda eulogizes motherly love thus: 'The position of the mother is the highest in the world, as it is the one place in which to learn and exercise the greatest unselfishness. The love of God is the only love that is higher than a mother's love; all other love is lower.' (*The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Edn. VIII, Vol. I, p. 66.) If it is the aim of the aspirant to merge the sense of 'I and mine' in the universal ego of the Deity, and to taste the bliss of consciousness through unquestioning dependence and refuge in that one reality, then in the motherhood of the Deity lies the guarantee for such a consummation. Through the different attitudes of quietude, service, and sonship to God, we do of course get

an increasingly greater degree of intimacy with Him; but the absolute self-absorption of the unquestioning child, perhaps, transcends even this.

And the aspirant wants that the Lord should, through His mercy, forgive all his weakness and inability and draw him to His lap with the fullest affection; he wants to be assured of his future by visualizing in the face of his Deity this dear and dependable smile of affection. From childhood he is used to this kind of assurance; why should he be deprived of this in the field of spiritual advance? The selfless *guru*, out of his compassion, imparts to the disciple the knowledge of higher things, whereby he can withdraw his mind from the enjoyment of worldly things. The infinitely glorious Deity, endowed with the best of all qualities and transcending the lapses and limitations of life, holds before the aspirant an unsurpassable ideal whereby he is inspired and energized to attain that state. The ever-loving and ever-smiling Mother melts the heart of the child with a touch of affection, wipes away from his mind all traces of past failures and dejection, and exerts an irresistible pull whereby he gets dissolved in an ocean of bliss and freedom from cares. Furthermore, in this transparently pure attitude of the aspirant, there is no room for any bad thought; and there is no touch of selfishness and meaningless emotionalism. This figure of the Mother, shining in Her self-collected poise and compassion is absolutely without a parallel. The aspirant, sitting fearlessly in Her lap or holding on to Her apron, can easily get across this wilderness of the world. God's incarnation as Mother was necessary for fulfilling these needs. And above all, it was necessary for the Deity to come down as the Holy Mother, so that the present sensuous and materially-minded world might be raised to a higher state of aspiration and experience. Humanity is, therefore, fortunate today in having this living and life-transforming Motherhood in a concrete form and in intimate touch with all the ramifications of life.

The Master was aware of this significance of the Mother's life and he apprised her of this. Subsequently, when an inquisitive disciple of the Mother asked her, 'Mother, other incarnations survived their Saktis (consorts)¹; but why did the Master precede you this time?' The Mother said in reply, 'My boy, you must be aware that the Master looked upon all in the world as Mother. He left me behind for demonstrating that motherhood to the world.' On another occasion she said, 'When the Master departed, I too felt like going away. But he appeared and said, "No, you stay on; there's much still to be done." In truth, I find at long last that there's much to do.'

One day at Cossipore the Mother noticed the Master looking at her for a long time, as though wishing to say something. And she said at last, 'Why don't you speak out what you wish to?' The Master said in an aggrieved tone, 'Well, my dear, won't you do anything? Should this (pointing to his own body) do everything single-handed?' The Mother, conscious of her helplessness, said, 'I am a woman. What can I do?' The Master at once corrected her, 'No, no, you'll have to do a lot.' When the Mother slipped down from the stairs at Cossipore, thereby spraining her ankle, she took rest barely for three days out of sheer necessity, and then, impelled by an extreme desire for service, she went up the Master's room with his food. Finding the Master reclining with his eyes closed, she said, 'It's time for your diet; get up.' The Master seemed to have returned from some far-off land and while still in that mood of aloofness, he said, 'See, the people of Calcutta appear to be crawling about like worms in the dark. Do look after them.' The Mother pleaded, 'I am a woman. How can that be?' The Master pointed towards his body and continued in the same strain, 'What after all has this one

1. This is not strictly correct. The questioner perhaps meant that the Saktis of the incarnations did nothing tangible after the incarnations had passed away.

done? You'll have to do much more.' The Mother wanted to change the topic and said with some emphasis, 'That will take its own time. Do take your food now.' Then the Master sat up.

Even before this, the Master used to sing:

To whom to explain the difficulty
I courted by coming here?
The wearer best knows where the shoe pinches
How can others know?
A maid am I in a foreign land
Where I blush to show my face.
I can't state, can't explain
What a handicap it's to be a woman.

And at the same time he told the Mother, 'Is this my trouble alone? It's yours too.'

The Master did not rest content with reminding her of her real nature and inviting her openly to shoulder the responsibility; he also presented his devotees to her and thus created a field for the expression of her latent motherhood. At the time of sending young Sarada (Swami Trigunatitananda) to the Mother for initiation he quoted a Bengali couplet to put faith in him:

Infinite is the maya of Radha which defies definition—
A million Krishnas and a million Ramas have birth, and
live, and die.

The Mother did not certainly initiate Sarada on that day, for she herself declared Swami Yogananda to be her first disciple, and his initiation took place at Vrindaban years after this. But Sarada's brother, Sri Ashutosh Mitra, maintains that the Mother initiated him. Perhaps, the Mother gave him as well a *mantra* after she had done so to Yogananda. Be that as it may, for the present we are not studying the Mother's reaction, but rather the Master's efforts at inducing her to active ministration.

With the growth of the Master's circle of devotees the Mother's domestic duties in the form of cooking, preparing betel rolls, etc., began to grow apace. Just then Latu had come to Dakshineswar to live with the Master.

At first he spent most of the day sitting at Panchavati and other places made holy by the Master's austerity. One day when the Master was proceeding to the tamarisk grove he noticed the Mother kneading the dough and a little further on he saw Latu in his meditation. He at once called the young man and said by way of correcting his mood, 'Hullo Latu, you are sitting here, and she over there can't get any one to make bread out of the dough!' Then he conducted Latu to the Nahabat and said, 'This boy is very pure of heart. When you have need of anything tell this boy; he will do it for you.' From that day Latu became a member of the Mother's family.

When Rakhal, the spiritual child of the Master, came to Dakshineswar, the Master introduced him to the Mother; and when Rakhal's wife came, he sent her to the Mother with the instruction, 'Let her (Mother) see her daughter-in-law's face after giving her a rupee.'¹ At the Master's direction Gopal-dada did all the marketing for the Mother and Yogin helped her in various other ways. When Purna, as a boy, began frequenting Dakshineswar, the Mother was one day asked to feed him. As desired by the Master she dressed the boy with garland and sandal paste and then sat by him to feed him most affectionately with the various dishes she had cooked for him. After the meal she poured water on his palms for washing his mouth. All this time the Master kept on pacing the small distance between the Nahabat and his room. He approached the Mother and gave some instruction as to how Purna was to be treated, then he walked away; but before he had gone far, some fresh idea occurred to him and he retraced his steps to communicate it to the Mother. Thus it went on till the end. As for the Mother, it seems that through this endearing contact with Purna, she had not only her motherly love partially satisfied, but she also learnt how to worship a boy as Narayana.

1. It is an old Hindu custom.

The Master always took pains to establish abidingly sweet relationships among the devotees and the Mother. When his devotee Balaram Babu's wife fell seriously ill, the Master told the Mother, 'Go, visit her.' The Mother was used to long walks and a distance of about five miles from the Kali temple to Balaram's house was not at all too long for her to cover on foot. But then, part of the way lay through the thickly populated city, and the Mother's sense of propriety told her that it would not be commendable for the Master's wife to be seen walking in the streets of Calcutta; and hence she said, 'How am I to go? There's no conveyance.' The Master replied, 'What! You won't go when my Balaram's family is facing disaster? You will walk; go on foot.' But the Mother had not to walk; for a palanquin was hired and she went in it to the devotee's house. It may be added in passing that during her stay at Shyampukur she visited Balaram's ailing wife once again on foot, and that of her own accord.

There is a funny incident suggestive of the Master's witty way of getting his own ideas expressed and executed through the medium of other people. Gauri-Ma was then a constant visitor to Dakshineswar, and she sometimes spent the night with the Mother at the Nahabat. One day the Master went there and asked her in the Mother's presence, 'Tell me, Gaur-dasi (Gauri-Ma), whom do you love more, me or her.' That sprightly lady avoided a direct answer and with a view to adding to the gaiety of the situation, sang in a sweet voice:

You aren't greater than Radha (your sweetheart), O Fluteplayer
(Krishna),
People in danger call on You as Madhusudana;
But when it's Your turn to cry, You make Your flute call,
'O thou Radha, thou young maid.'

The meaning of the song was very clear. The Mother pressed Gauri-Ma's hand in sheer shame, and the Master left smiling in utter discomfiture.

We get another illustration of a similar nature from the *Sri Ramakrishna Punthi* (pp. 353–355). One day Sri Kalipada Ghosh's wife came to the Master with a sorrowful face and a heart full of distress to tell her tale of woe. Her husband had fallen into bad company and was bringing ruin on the whole family; if the Master could prescribe some remedy, she would be saved from a life of torment. Kali Babu had not visited the Master up till then; and the people of Calcutta had not as yet come to recognize in the Master a prophet of the highest spiritual order who was absolutely free from any show of supernatural powers. Not knowing much of this unsullied saintliness, the lady wanted some kind of charm from him. This was galling to the Master, but for some reason best known to him—it might have been through sheer fun, or real pity for the lady or some inscrutable design—he did not dismiss her outright, but advised her to go to the Nahabat saying, 'There's a woman there. Tell her everything without reserve, and she will give you the real remedy. She knows such *mantras* and charms, and in this matter her power is greater than mine.' The Holy Mother was then at worship with her mind soaring in a domain of extreme compassion. She heard the woman with full sympathy, but did not do anything forthwith; for it appeared to her that the Master was only having a little fun. And yet unwilling to disappoint such a distressed soul, she said, 'What, after all, can I know, my child? In truth, he knows the charm; do go to him.' Finding the woman returning, the Master, perhaps concluded that the fun had worked; accordingly, to add more zest to it, he sent her again to the Nahabat. When the lady had thus been tossed between the Master and Mother thrice, the Mother took pity on her. She did not want to reduce the whole affair to a merry joke, thus adding insult to injury. Accordingly, she consoled her and taking a *bel* leaf out of the offerings made to the deity, handed it over to her saying, 'Take this with you, my child; this will fulfil your desire.' The lady received the leaf

with the greatest reverence and took leave of the Mother. In due course Kalipada Ghosh's mind took a turn for the better, and by stages he became one of the staunch followers of the Master. Through this small incident the Master made the Mother open out her heart in practical benevolence.

Thus as days rolled on, the Mother was becoming consciously or unconsciously more and more intimately associated with the Master's mission of spiritual regeneration, though the mode of expression of her infinite power was naturally orientated by her predominant mood of motherliness.

A yearning for children is deep-rooted in the hearts of women. In most cases, motherhood centres on one's own children, thus making it indistinguishable from selfishness. In some cases other children, too, are associated with one's own, when motherly love takes the form of philanthropy. Sometimes, though rarely, this affection transcends physical relationships and expands over the whole of creation, thereby rendering divine the life of the mother. Even more rarely it comes down in the form of spiritual inspiration in the life of a godly woman who remains absolutely untouched by the world, and whose words and acts open up all closed hearts and lead them Godward. But the motherhood with which we stand face to face in the life of Sri Sarada Devi is of a higher order, being coextensive with Divine love, and hence truly unique and incomparable. And yet from a rational point of view there is a gradation in its manifestation; and a rational comprehension presupposes an analytical study of it in stages. But while we try to grasp its working on any particular level, we must not lose sight of the basic unity running through this life as a whole, in the light of which alone these stages have to be traversed.

When and how was this pure and selfless yearning for divine motherhood first kindled in the recesses of the Mother's heart? Perhaps she had it in her to the fullest

extent even before she was aware of it. This is the natural psychological process. As a matter of fact, we noticed that in her girlhood she attended on her younger brothers, and helped to cool by fanning the food served to famished people. Events of a similar nature have forced themselves on our attention when studying her relations with the devotees at Dakshineswar. But here we are thinking more of the conscious rise of that sentiment and its operation, rather than its hidden working.

She heard her sympathetic friends condemning all childless women as unfortunate and inauspicious. Her mother too, lamented at times thus: 'To what a mad son-in-law have I married my daughter! Alas, she has no family life, no child, and does not hear any one calling her "mother".' The Master one day heard this and said, 'Dear mother-in-law, you need have no disappointment on that score. Your daughter will have so many children, you will see in the long run, that the distressing call of "mother" will make her bewildered.'

The Master's prophecy apart, the Mother herself related how by constantly listening to others, the craving for children woke up in her heart: 'I heard, ever and anon, both here and at Kamarpukur, that a woman, unless she has become a mother is not fit for any (auspicious) work. A barren woman cannot take part in any auspicious work. I was very young then. These words set me thinking sorrowfully, "Of a truth, should even a single son be denied me?" When I went to Dakshineswar, the question once arose in my mind. When I first had the thought, I did not tell anybody; but the Master said spontaneously, "Why do you worry? I shall leave you such jewels of children as one can hardly get even if one performs the severest of austerity, to the extent of cutting off one's head. You will find in the end so many children calling you 'mother', that you will be unable to manage them all.'"'

Women have been cherishing this desire for children in their hearts from time immemorial. True it is that the

Mother had some taste of this motherhood even during the lifetime of the Master; but that did not satisfy her infinite yearning. The Mother herself has spoken of her feeling of disappointment: 'When the Master departed, I thought in solitude—I was then at Kamarpukur—"I've no son and nothing else; what will be my lot?" One day the Master appeared and said, "Why do you worry? You want one son—I have left for you all these jewels of sons. In time many will call you mother."' The Master talked of things lying in the womb of futurity. But at present we are studying how far this longing of the Mother and this assurance of the Master bore fruit when the latter was still in the world.

The Mother treated the young devotees at Dakshineswar as her own children and felt a strong affection for them. When the need arose, she could protect them more tenderly than even a mother could or did. A crazy woman used to come to the Master at Dakshineswar. At first all took her to be merely insane and so treated her kindly. Afterwards it turned out that she belonged to that class of spiritual aspirants who consider God as their sweetheart. As she identified Sri Ramakrishna with God, she mentally developed that peculiar attitude towards him. As contrasted with this, the Master regarded all women as veritable manifestations of the Universal Mother. Without considering seriously the consequences of such a contradiction, the crazy woman ventured one day to speak out her mind to him. As a reaction to such an antagonistic sentiment, the Master was thrown so violently into a fit of childlike protest that he jumped up from his seat instantaneously, his cloth dropped down from his loins, and he began to pace the room like a madman, cursing such a relationship in the strongest terms he could muster. The Mother heard all this from the Nahabat. Feeling humiliated by this insult to her daughter, she said to Golap-Ma, 'Just look at this! If she has been unthinking in her talk, should he not have sent her to me? What's the meaning

of abusing her like this?' She sent Golap-Ma at once to call the crazy woman to her, and when the woman came, she said affectionately, 'My daughter, you may as well not go to him, since your presence irritates him; you can come to me.'

In those days, many of the young devotees spent some nights at Dakshineswar practising spiritual disciplines under the Master's guidance. As overeating hinders concentration of mind, he kept a strict eye on their regimen, and instructed the Holy Mother to give Rakhal six *chapatis*, Latu five and Gopal-dada and Baburam four each. The Mother, however, could not tolerate this kind of limitation to her own field of motherly care; and hence she gave to each according to his need, much in excess of the Master's prescription. One day the Master discovered on enquiry from Baburam that he got five or six *chapatis* at night, and that the Mother was responsible for this. He accordingly went to her and tried to impress on her that she was spoiling their future by her heedless affection. But the Mother protested saying, 'Why do you get upset because he had just two more *chapatis*? I shall look to their future. Don't you take them to task for this matter of eating.' The Master said nothing by way of reply, but in his mind he saluted that all-conquering motherliness and left the place with a smile. He must have been delighted that day to find the Mother consciously entering on her future field of activity.

From Yogin-Ma we learn that the Mother welcomed the women devotees with the utmost affection and this pleased the Master. When that devout lady went to Dakshineswar for the first time, the Master came to learn that she was going without any food; and so he sent her to the Nahabat saying, 'There's some rice and vegetables inside; go and have your food.' The Mother hurriedly placed before her all that was available—rice, *luchi*,¹ vegetables, etc., and fed her with great care. That first meet-

1. Flat pieces of cake made with flour and fried in clarified butter.

ing ripened into intimacy, so much so, that when a few days later the Mother got into a boat to cross the Ganges for going to Kamarpukur to be present at her nephew Ramlal's marriage, Yogin-Ma kept on looking as long as the boat could be seen and then began to weep. The Master found her in that state and consoled her. When the Mother returned, he told her, 'That girl with big eyes who comes here, loves you very much. The day you left, she wept at the Nahabat.' The Mother said, 'Yes, her name is Yogen.¹' The Mother had so much affection for and faith in Yogin-Ma that she consulted her at every turn. After Yogin-Ma had dressed her hair, the Mother would not untie the chignon for three or four days together and would say, 'No, it was dressed by Yogen; I shall untie when she comes again.'

Yogin-Ma, one day, noticed the Mother putting spices in some betel rolls, while others were prepared without them. Curiosity impelled her to ask, 'Mother, why did you not put cardamom and other spices in these? For whom are those meant, and for whom these?' The Mother replied, 'Yogen, these (the spiced ones) are for the devotees; I have to make them my own through love and care. And those are for the Master; he is already my own.'

There was then a constant flow of devotees and religious singing in groups or singly was the order of the day. The Mother who had consecrated her life for the service and happiness of the Master, and consequently of the devotees, had no rest. Cooking went on day and night. And yet in the midst of all this, her mind was ever at the feet of the Master. Owing to this incomparable concentration of mind, she seemed to know the Master's thoughts even before he opened his lips, and she arranged accordingly. Sarada, Purna, and others might not have the money to return to Calcutta either because of poverty or because

1. The Mother called both Swami Yogananda and Yogin-Ma by the same name Yogen; and to distinguish between the two she often added son or daughter before the name.

their guardians were opposed to such visits. Therefore, the Master directed them to take the necessary money from the Mother. The fare from the Baranagore bazar to Beadon Square in Calcutta for a seat in a hackney carriage in those days, was one anna. The Mother knew that Sarada needed money since he had to come surreptitiously eluding his father's vigilance. So whenever Sarada came she kept in advance a one anna piece on the steps of the Nahabat for him to find at the time of departure. As soon as she heard the Master telling Narendra on his arrival, 'You will stay here today,' the Mother at once began boiling gram and preparing *chapatis*, for Narendra liked thick *chapatis* with gram soup. When the Master came to instruct the Mother about Narendra's food, he found that he had been anticipated. If women devotees came to Dakshineswar late in the evening, it became a problem for the Master to accommodate them during the night. Knowing as he did that the Nahabat was a cramped place, he used to ask them to sleep on the covered terrace outside his room; but the Mother assured them that there would be sufficient space for them in the Nahabat itself. The devotees had their food at the Nahabat and then went to the Master for a little talk. On returning to the Nahabat they found to their amazement that single-handed the Mother had cleaned up the whole place and spread beds for all. Moreover, she drew them all to her side so cordially that they felt no need to go elsewhere.

In this way, the great desire of the Master to give shape to his message on the one hand, and the deep affection of the Mother for her children on the other, combined to attract her more and more to the field that was eminently her own. Through this joint effort, too, the inner circle of devotees of the Mother was selected even in those early days. We have already referred in passing to some of her young sons who became monks afterwards. We have also on occasions referred to Yogin-Ma and Golap-Ma who

were the Jaya and Vijaya¹ of the Holy Mother in the present incarnation. We shall refer to some more interesting and illuminating incidents about these two devout souls before we pass on to other topics.

After the Master went to Shyampukur for treatment, the Mother, left behind at Dakshineswar, was passing her days in great sorrow and anxiety. Just then Golap-Ma happened to tell Yogin-Ma casually in the course of a talk, 'It strikes me, Yogen, that the Master left for Calcutta because he was angry with the Mother.' When the Mother came to learn of this from Yogin-Ma, she could not control her tears. She at once proceeded to Shyampukur in a carriage and asked the Master, 'Is it true that you have come here because you are angry with me?' The Master replied, 'No, who told you so?' 'Golap,' replied the Mother. The Master flared up at this and said, 'Is that so? Did she make you cry by saying so? Does she not know who you are?' Where is Golap? Let her come!' Fully consoled, the Mother came back to Dakshineswar. When Golap-Ma next appeared before the Master he reproached her saying, 'What's this that you said to make her cry? Don't you know who she is? Go at once and beg her pardon.' Golap-Ma forthwith walked to Dakshineswar and with tears in her eyes said, 'Mother, the Master is very angry with me. I said it all in sheer thoughtlessness.' The Mother made no direct reply, but with a laugh she patted Golap-Ma's back thrice saying, 'O dear Golap!' Golap-Ma's heart was instantly lightened.

When Golap-Ma first went to Dakshineswar, she was overwhelmed with grief for her only child, a daughter, named Chandi. The Master received her warmly and after more intimacy told the Mother; 'You should feed her (Golap-Ma) to her heart's content; if the stomach is full, the sorrow will be assuaged.' On another occasion he told

1. Jaya and Vijaya are the two maids of the Mother of the Universe. The Holy Mother sometimes referred to Golap-Ma and Yogin-Ma as her Jaya and Vijaya.

the Mother, 'You should take care of this brahmin girl (Golap-Ma). She it is who will be your constant companion.' Needless to say that the Mother accepted her with open arms, and Golap-Ma too, took up her position as the Mother's maid from that very time. There were slight differences of temperament between the two as we have noticed but they did not ever so slightly ruffle the surface of their lives,—so intimately bound to each other did they become.

We now turn to Yogin-Ma. When the Master was ill at Cossipore, she longed to go to Vrindaban for practising austerity, and she informed the Master accordingly. At this his face brightened up and he said encouragingly, 'So you want to go to Vrindaban! It'll be excellent. Do go there; you'll find everything there.' The Mother was then present in the room with his diet. He turned his eyes to her and asked Yogin-Ma, 'Did you tell her? What does she say?' 'Whatever was to be said has been said by you already,' intervened the Mother. 'What is there to add?' The Master did not seem to heed this, but advised Yogin-Ma again, 'My dear child, go after obtaining her consent—you will get everything.' Unmindful of this, the Mother picked up the empty bowl and started going downstairs. Yogin-Ma followed her.

Next morning Yogin-Ma came to Cossipore to take leave before starting on her pilgrimage. After making her obeisance to the Master she went to the Mother to bow down to her. The Mother then laid her hand on Yogin-Ma's head and as a blessing made *japa* of her *mantra*, counting it on her fingers. Two days later Yogin-Ma went to Vrindaban and took shelter in Kala Babu's Kunja (grove) on the Yamuna, which belonged to Balaram Babu's family and which was dedicated to a deity that received their regular worship.

IN UNDYING UNION

It was fast becoming clear from the steady deterioration in the health of the Master that after entrusting the task of spiritual regeneration to the worthy hands of the Holy Mother and the chosen disciples, he was fast approaching the day of final departure. But the Mother could not accept this as inevitable. She had experienced the grace of Simhavahini in her own life, had seen the economic condition of her father's family improve through the favour of Jagad-dhatri, and had received signs of the Lord's mercy in many ways and many a time in the days of stress and strain. Would not that compassionate God cast His benign look at them in this critical hour? Would not the Divine heart melt at the tears of a faithful wife? After long deliberation, the Mother decided to go to Tarakeshwar and lie there fasting day and night at the temple of Siva who is known as the fulfiller of all wishes; for once, at least, she must try and see if the inexorable Divine law had not an exception, if Providence could not be moved by the piteous wail of a creature in distress.

Five years earlier the Master had indicated the omens that would precede his passing away — he would accept food indiscriminately from any one, would spend the night in Calcutta, and would eat food a part of which had been given to somebody earlier — which had all come true even before he left Dakshineswar. On his return to Dakshineswar after spending the night at Balaram Babu's house during the car festival (*ratha-yatra*) of 1885, he told her of another sign, 'When you find many people accepting, honouring and adoring this (pointing to himself) as the Deity, you will know that the time of disappearance is near at hand.' That portent too, the Mother might have taken as having been already fulfilled; for were there not quite a number of devout souls who looked upon the Master as God incarnate? And while at Cossipore she got a concrete

illustration too. A few devotees went with some sweets one day to meet the Master at Dakshineswar. But to their dismay they learnt that he had gone to Calcutta for treatment; so they offered the sweets to the Master's picture and then took the *prasada*. When the news reached the Master, he said, 'Why did they make the offering to the picture instead of to the Mother?' The Holy Mother and others became upset at the news of this offering to a picture of the Master even while the Master was in flesh and blood; for such adoration of a living person augured ill for him. But the Master removed their consternation by emphatically asserting, 'Don't you be worried, my dear! I shall be worshipped in every house hereafter; I say this upon oath, so help me God.' Therefore it became very clear that not only was destiny against her, but that the Master also was determined to bid adieu. From that point of view, in fact, there was nothing to cheer her. And yet hope lingers though belief passes away; and nobody can keep silent without calling on God who is our only source of solace amid blank despair.

The Mother went to Tarakeshwar; the Master did not object. It is not known who were her companions. Perhaps Lakshmi Devi and a maid-servant went with her. She lay down there for two days without food and water — but there was no sign of Siva's blessing. On the second night, the Mother continued there as before, craving the Lord's mercy, when she heard a crackling sound much resembling the sound of some earthen jars piled up together being broken with a stick. That woke her up, and the thought took possession of her mind: 'Who is a husband in this world and of whom? Who is related to whom here? For whom am I sacrificing my life here?' It was as though a distant rumbling of the horn of Rudra, the great Destroyer, was ushering in the dissolution of the world, rending asunder all earthly ties, and creating in every heart an incomprehensible vacuum. The Mother got up from her bed and somehow felt her way to the basin behind the temple where

the holy water offered to Siva, had accumulated, and taking up a little of it in her hand she quenched her thirst. Then she felt relieved. Thus foiled in her attempt to save the Master, she left next day for Cossipore. The finite human mind sometimes shoots upward through some divine inspiration to lose itself in the infinitude of the cosmic mind getting thereby a new and all-encompassing outlook, as a result of which the old worldly ties look ephemeral and meaningless and are, therefore, automatically discarded. This immersion of the microcosm into the macrocosm is what we call renunciation. Through the influence of that overpowering self-abnegation the Mother was deflected from her resolve and returned disappointed to Cossipore. The Master knew all this, and in good humour he said, 'How now, my dear? Did you get anything? — nothing at all!'

The time of the Master's passing away was fast approaching—to prevent it was beyond human capacity. Mother had premonition of this in various other ways. She said, 'The Master too saw in a dream an elephant going out to get a medicine. Just as the elephant began digging the earth for the medicine, Gopal came and woke him up. He asked me, "Do you have any dream?" I saw Mother Kali with her neck turned aside, and asked Her, "Mother, why are you in this posture?" Mother Kali replied, "Because of his that thing there (pointing to the Master's sore in the throat) I too have it." ' The Mother at once realized that if Mother Kali could not or would not cure the Master in spite of her suffering equally with him, then what could mere human beings do? Moreover, the Master also gave an explanation of his disease which was calculated to raise the Mother's mind above worldly considerations to a level of universal compassion. He said, 'I am being subjected to all the sufferings that there can be; none of you need have it again. I have suffered for all in the world.' It became quite evident to the Mother that that was the real explanation of the Master's martyrdom; otherwise why should such a sinless body have undergone such torture?

The month of August (1886) was well advanced. Through words and deeds the Master went on dropping hints that the day of final departure was at hand. But human hearts recoil from contemplating the poignant. Hence the devotees refused to believe their eyes and ears; and the Lord too, lifted the veil of that mortifying future momentarily and then covered up the devotees' minds in a shroud of mystery. One day the Master sent for the Mother through Shashi (Swami Ramakrishnananda), remarking that she was very intelligent and would, therefore, understand his condition. On her arrival, he said, 'Look here, my dear, I don't know why thoughts of Brahman are ever stirring my mind.' What answer could the Mother make? The sight of that frail, emaciated body was too heart-rending for her; hence she uttered a few consoling words and then turned her face round to wipe off her tears. How helpless she felt! It was impossible to hold back the Master's mind in its headlong rush to the quietude of Brahman.

On the day of passing away, the Master sat on his bed leaning against the pillows. It was a sick-bed, and the light of hope had been extinguished; and so all round there was a dark pall of sadness. All thought that the power of speech had left him; but when the Mother and Lakshmi Devi came, he said, 'So here you are? Look here, it seems I am going somewhere—all through water to a far-off place.' The Mother began weeping. But the Master continued, 'You need have no anxiety; you will be just as you have been so long; and they (meaning Narendra and others) will look after you and do for you as much as they have done for me. Do have an eye on dear Lakshmi.'

The sub-conscious of the Mother had been fluttering with trepidation at the black shadows of the imminent calamity passing over it. Everything around her seemed to be out of hinges and full of evil portent. She had been cooking some *khichudi* for her sons engaged in the Master's service; the bottom portion of it got burnt. She served the upper portion to the boys and ate the lower

portion herself. She had spread a piece of cloth on the roof for drying; it was not to be found. There was an earthen goblet; it fell and broke into pieces in the process of being lifted up.

Then came the midnight of the 15th August; and midnight passed into the small hours of the 16th. It was two minutes past one o'clock. That garden house dotted with shrubs and trees, on the outskirts of the city, was steeped in absolute silence; only the devotees sitting by the bed of Sri Ramakrishna kept a helpless vigil as they found him immersed in *samadhi*, which lengthened into hours till there was no possibility of a reawakening. The physician came to announce that all hope had been shattered. Next day the holy body was consigned to a sacred fire at the cremation ground on the Ganges at Cossipore; and when all was over, the ashes were gathered in a copper vessel which was carried to the garden house and placed on the Master's bed.

In the evening the Mother sat to remove her ornaments one by one; and when at last she was about to take off her gold bracelets, the Master suddenly appeared in his body just as it was before he had the disease, and taking hold of her hands said, 'Have I died that you are removing the signs of a married woman from your wrists?' She then desisted from doing so. Balaram Babu had brought a white piece of cloth without any coloured border, to be worn by her as a sign of widowhood. When he gave this to Golap-Ma to be passed on to the Mother, Golap-Ma said with a start, 'By Jove! Who is going to hand over to her the white cloth without coloured borders?' Later, when she went to the Mother, she found she had torn a portion of the broad border of her own cloth to make it very thin. From that day she wore clothes with thin red borders and not the absolutely white ones. For, there is really no end to the everlasting play of the Master; and there is really no separation of the Mother from him.

On the third day, food was offered before the reliquary. Now, the older devotees decided that after the Master had shuffled off his mortal coil, there was no meaning in retaining the garden house. But the young devotees like Narendra wanted to continue the lease for sometime more, so as to allow sufficient time to the Mother to get over the shock and to have a place for keeping the Master's ashes. But as they had no monetary backing they could not stand up against the older people. Therefore the final decision was that the house would be given up on the expiry of the lease, the urn containing the ashes would be removed before then to the Kankurgachhi garden of Ram Babu, which the Master had once made holy by a visit, and the Holy Mother would go elsewhere. But some of the young devotees did not readily agree to part with the ashes. For both the lay and the monastic devotees had settled at first by common consent that the copper urn would be interred in a plot of land to be purchased on the sacred Ganges. Considering, however, the great expenditure involved and for other reasons, the householders changed their view afterwards. As this new decision did not appeal to the young devotees, they removed more than half of the ashes and the pieces of bone to a separate vessel which was then sent to the house of Balaram Babu (*vide Udbodhan*, Vol. XVII. p. 440). Then they heartily co-operated in interring the first copper jar at Kankurgachhi on the 23rd August, which was the holy birthday of Sri Krishna.

The Holy Mother, who heard much of this controversy, took no sides in it because of her extreme mood of indifference consequent on the stunning blow; and she said to Golap-Ma with a sigh, 'Look at these bickerings, Golap; that precious person, worth his weight in gold, is gone, and they are quarrelling about his ashes!' How far removed from partisan consideration, indeed, was the clear vision of the Holy Mother even in that moment of agonizing grief! Soon she became ready to leave Cossipore. At

the invitation of the great devotee Balaram Babu, she went to his house on the afternoon of the 21st August. It can be well understood that at the passing away of the Master and the thought of her helpless condition, she was very much overwhelmed. Though subsequently she had a direct vision of the Master's permanent divine body and heard the call 'Mother' from the lips of her children, and though this assuaged her agony a little, yet the terrible physical separation was not easy to forget. At every turn, and with every thought the Mother was being reminded that the Master was not there just as he used to be. The devotees too, knew of this state of her mind. And they, therefore, planned to send her on a pilgrimage to places which had been sanctified by the Lord in his previous incarnations and on which He had impressed His indelible marks, so that by coming face to face with these indubitable signs of the Lord's undying presence she might forget the pangs of separation and by being far away from the places so fresh with the Master's memory, she might somewhat recover from that agonizing grief. Accordingly, she started for Vrindavan on the 30th August, 1886, accompanied by Golap-Ma, Lakshmi Devi, Master Mahashaya's wife, Swami Yogananda, Swami Abhedananda, and Swami Adbhutananda.

On the way they got down at Deoghar to worship Vaidyanatha (Siva) and then they proceeded to Banaras, where they stayed for some eight or ten days worshipping Viswanatha (Siva), goddess Annapurna, and other well-known deities. The Mother climbed the tower of Venimadhava, from which could be seen the city of Banaras. One day, during the evening services at the Viswanatha temple, her spiritual fervour was so highly enkindled that unconscious of what she was doing she walked to her dwelling place with unusually heavy steps. Questioned about this, she explained, 'The Master had led me by hand from the temple.' Along with others she visited Swami Bhaskarananda one day. The Swami was naked and He

said to them, 'Mothers, don't you feel shy, for you are all forms of the Mother of the Universe. How can any shame arise?' About her impression of the Swami the Mother said, 'What a poised, great soul! In heat and cold alike he sits uncovered!'

From Banaras they all reached Ayodhya, the birth-place of Sri Ramachandra, where they visited some places associated with his divine disport. On the way to Vrindavan from Ayodhya, the Mother got another vision of the Master under peculiar circumstances. On her arm was the gold amulet which the Master wore in the name of his chosen deity. She was reclining with that arm uppermost near the window of the railway compartment in which she was travelling. The Master peeped in through the window to say, 'Mind you that the amulet is with you; see that it is not lost.' She at once took it off and put it into the tin box in which was kept the picture of the Master that she worshipped daily. She never wore it again, but worshipped it along with the picture. On arriving at Vrindavan they put up at the Kala Babu's grove, belonging to Balaram Babu's family, on the Yamuna.

It was about the middle of September when the rains were over and the woods of Vrindaban looked fresh and smiling. The trees had thick green foliage; the ground was covered with grass; the air was saturated with the sweet smell of flowers; all around could be heard the cry of peacocks and the lowing of cattle; there were deer grazing fearlessly by the wayside and taking to flight with raised ears at the sound of human steps; and the Yamuna, full to the brim, was coursing down with a murmuring sound. Vrindavan had still its wonted beauty and those associations of old—the Nikunja grove, the dust made wet by Radha's tears of separation, the fields of Vraja hallowed by the longing lingering looks of the cowherd girls searching for Krishna—all these were there, and everywhere the deep indelible impression of Krishna enkindled an irresistible desire to see him; but he himself was nowhere to

be found. So after arrival at Vrindavan, there welled forth from the heart of the Mother, bleeding from the recent wound of separation, an excruciating moan of agony. Before this, she had visions of the Master at least three or four times. But the lack of an inalienably tangible union with him to whose feet all the strings of her heart were tied, oppressed her mind and aroused in it the endless question, 'Where is he?' After coming to Vrindavan the Mother was ever in tears, and to these were added the tears of Yogin-Ma who had preceded her there. When the two met, the Mother clasped Yogin-Ma to her heart. Having heard everything from others and having the mournful Mother before her very eyes, Yogin-Ma also began to bemoan the loss continually. Then the Master appeared to them one night and said, 'Well, my dears, why do you weep so much? Here am I. Where indeed could I have gone? It's just like walking from this room to that.'

Following this vision and assurance, the Mother's flow of tears lessened; but the pangs of separation were still there, and they now found expression through a different channel. In the section of the *Bhagavata*, called the *Gopi-gita*, we read that when Krishna suddenly disappeared from the field of his amorous disport, the cowherd lasses, overpowered with grief and forgetful of everything around, began a long search for him; but baffled in this and therefore lost in anxious longing for him all the more, they gradually came to identify themselves mentally with the object of their intense love, so much so that they started impersonating him in various ways. In the body and mind of the Mother also was now to be seen a similar self-absorption. Forgetful of herself she sometimes walked across the vast sandy shore to the waters of the Yamuna unknown to anybody and she had to be searched out and persuaded to return. One does not know, she might have then thought of herself as Radha, the sweetheart of Krishna, and of Sri Ramakrishna as Krishna, and was thus lost in the bliss of union in the Vrindavan of her heart! It is said that she

once told a devotee, 'I, indeed, am Radha.' At times, again, rapt in the thoughts of the Master, she became one with him. One day she lost all outer consciousness in a deep *samadhi* from which she could not be roused in spite of Yogin-Ma's repeating the Lord's name in her ears for a long time. Then Swami Yogananda made a similar attempt, when there appeared signs of reawakening, and she said, 'I shall eat,' just as the Master used to say after a deep *samadhi*. When some food, water, and betel were held before her, she took a little just like the Master; nay, she chewed the betel just like him, after biting off the conical portion with her teeth. At that time Swami Yogananda put several questions to her, to which she replied in the Master's manner. In fact, all her gestures and postures at that time resembled those of the Master. After coming back to the normal plane, she herself admitted that the Master had engulfed her for the time being.

The Mother being thus occupied with the thoughts of the Master, her talks and movements appeared to be unrelated to the actualities of life and rather like those of a simple child. One day, on seeing a dead body, covered with flowers and garlands, being carried to the cremation ground with music, she said with some eagerness, 'Look there, look, how the man (by dying in Vrindavan) has attained (the eternal) Vrindavan. We came here to lay down our bodies; but we never had so much as fever for a day! You can well calculate how old we have grown — we have seen our fathers, and the elder brothers of our husbands!'

Yogin-Ma and others burst out laughing at this and said, 'What a strange thing you say Mother: you have seen your father! Who ever does not see one's father?'

The Mother lived at Vrindavan for about a year. A month later Master Mahashaya's wife was attacked with malaria and she had to leave for Calcutta with Swami Abhedananda. Swami Adbhutananda also went to Calcutta after six

months on getting some sad news from Ramachandra Datta's house.

The long stay at Vrindavan had the effect of bringing to some extent the Mother's mind down to the normal plane. The Master ultimately granted her a continuous flow of bliss in proportion as he had previously given her grief. She went round the temples daily, seeing the different images and sitting for meditation at suitable places. She must have been blessed with many visions at that time, though she never gave them out. Only of one of these incidents did she tell Yogin-Ma. That day she had been to the temple of Radharamana where she had a vision of the wife of Navagopal Ghosh (both husband and wife being devotees of the Master), standing by the deity and fanning Him. On her return home she said, 'Yogen, Navagopal's wife is very pure. I had such and such a vision.'

Some time during their stay there the Mother and her party undertook a ceremonial circumambulation of Vrindaban for more than a fortnight. During this walk the Mother seemed to be looking at the roads, fields, and forests of the place with intense interest; at times she stopped altogether lost in her reverie. To Yogin-Ma and others it was clear that she was in a spiritual mood and was having some visions too. So now and then they put questions to her out of curiosity. But the Mother put them off with a simple answer, 'No, that's nothing; move on.'

Here the Master got one of his unfinished tasks accomplished through the Mother; and in the Mother's life too, a new chapter opened. The Master appeared before the Mother and said, 'Give this *mantra* to Yogin.' on the first day the Mother thought that it was a mere phantasy and so did nothing. Besides, she felt ashamed, thinking, 'People will say, "Mother has begun to have disciples within such a short period (of her mourning)"'. She did not also pay heed to a second vision of this kind.

On the third day she remonstrated with the Master, 'I don't so much as talk with him (Yogin); how can I impart the *mantra*?' The Master suggested, 'You tell daughter Yogen; she will be present.' He also told her the *mantra*. The Mother inquired of Swami Yogananda through Yogin-Ma whether he had his initiation. He said, 'No, Mother, the Master didn't give me any particular *mantra* of any special deity. I repeat one according to my own choice.' He further let her know that he too had been asked by the Master to be initiated by the Mother, but he could not make the request because of his natural modesty. At last the Mother agreed to initiate him. On the appointed day, the Mother had an onset of spiritual fervour as she sat in worship before the picture and the physical remains of the Master. She called in Swami Yogananda and while still in that ecstatic mood, imparted the *mantra*, which was uttered so loudly that Yogin-Ma could hear it from the adjoining room. Swami Yogananda was the Mother's first disciple.

Towards the end of this period of stay at Virndavan, the Mother once went to Hardwar with Swami Yogananda, Yogin-Ma, Golap-Ma, and Lakshmi Devi. On the way Swami Yogananda was suddenly attacked with high fever in the train. When Yogin-Ma was giving him pomegranate seeds, the Mother saw as though the Master himself was being fed. In a state of unconsciousness resulting from high temperature, Swami Yogananda saw a terrible form standing in front of him and telling him, 'I would have seen you through but I am helpless. There's the order of Paramahansa Deva (Sri Ramakrishna), and I have to quit at once.' When departing, the figure pointed to a deity with red clothes and directed him to offer some *rasa-gollas*¹ to her. The fever abated at once. At Hardwar the Mother bathed at the Brahma-kunda and visited the

1. A Bengali sweet made with balls of cheese boiled in syrup, to make them spongy and juicy; whence the name *rasa-golla* or juice-ball.

temples. She had with her some nail-parings and hair of the Master, a portion of which she intended to offer in the holy water of the Ganges at Hardwar. This she did at the Brahma-kunda. Besides, she crossed the Ganges to climb the Chandi hill and worship the goddess Chandi there.

Then with her companions she went to Jaipur. After they had seen the main deity Govindaji, they went on visiting the other deities, when suddenly they came to a goddess, on seeing whom Swami Yogananda cried out that this was the very deity he had seen during his last fever. She was Sitala, the goddess of small pox. The goddess was offered half a rupee worth of *rasagollas* which were fortunately available near the temple gate. From Jaipur they went to Pushkar where the Mother climbed the Savitri hill. Though her right leg had become rheumatic at Dakshineswar, she could still move about freely, so that it was not too strenuous for her to ascend the Savitri and the Chandi hills and walk round Vrindavan for a fortnight.

After spending a year in the holy places of the north, they proceeded to Calcutta by way of Allahabad, where at the sacred confluence of the Ganges and the Yamuna, the Mother offered the remaining portion of the Master's nails and hair. Of this the Mother said, 'Is the Master's hair an ordinary thing? When I went to Prayag (Allahabad) after his demise, I carried with me his hair for immersion in the holy water. As I took up the hair in hand with a view to offering it in the placid water of the confluence of the Ganges and the Yamuna, a wave leaped up unawares and took away the hair from my hand and hid itself again in the placid water around. That holy place snatched away that thing from my hand for its own sanctification.'

At this place Lakshmi Devi, a widow as she was, had her head shaved clean according to the custom of the place; the Mother did not do so. Before her mind's eye

was being played then the drama of her constant union with the Master and through the physical eyes, too, she was having frequent visions of him. Accordingly, she could not remove her hair just as she could not take off her ornaments earlier. Thus brimming with the happiness born of visiting the most sacred places and the repeated visions of the Master, she returned to Calcutta, where she stayed in the house of Balaram Bose.

IN HER HUSBAND'S COTTAGE

The Holy Mother stayed at Balaram Babu's house for about a week and then went to Kamarpukur. Before starting for the place, she visited Dakshineswar to bow down before all the deities and have another look at everything associated with the Master. Swami Yogananda, Golap-Ma, and some others accompanied her up to Kamarpukur. They went to Burdwan by train, from where they walked the rest of the way for lack of money. The first phase of their journey from Burdwan to Uchalan, a distance of about sixteen miles, tired out the Mother very much, and she felt hungry. At Uchalan, Golap-Ma managed to cook a little *khichudi* on tasting which the Mother said, 'O Golap, what a delicacy you have prepared!' Swami Yogananda and others left for their places after staying at Kamarpukur for a few days. Then began the Mother's sorrowful life at that village, during which time she was practically alone, as she had none to sympathise with her or even to talk to her, barring some two or three old acquaintances.

When during the Master's illness at Cossipore, his nephew Ramlal came to see him one day, the Master told him, 'You will serve Bhavatarini (Kali at Dakshineswar), and so you will not lack anything. He then turned to the Mother and said, 'You will live at Kamarpukur, and look after Lakshmi a little. You will not have to provide for her food; but see that she does not leave home to go elsewhere! The devotees will have as much veneration for you as they have for me.' To Ramlal, again, he said, 'See that your aunt stays at Kamarpukur.' Ramlal replied, 'She will stay wherever she wills.' The Master easily saw through the meaning of that statement, and he reproved him saying, 'How is that, my boy? Why have

1. She became a widow soon after marriage and stayed in her father's house at Kamarpukur.

you been born a man?' Lakshmi Devi had been to Vrindavan with the Mother, but she did not go to Kamarpukur, preferring to live with her brothers at Dakshineswar. As for Ramlal, he not only refused to shoulder any responsibility for the Mother, but also created a tremendous difficulty for her. Trailokyanath Vishwas, son of Mathuranath and grandson of Rani Rasmani granted a small allowance of seven rupees for the Mother. But during her stay at Vrindavan, Ramlal dinned it into the ears of the cashier of the temple that the devotees of the Master were looking after her, and that there was, therefore, no need for an allowance from the temple. So that contribution was stopped.¹ Swami Vivekananda and others argued against such a step, but to no effect. When the Mother heard of it, she said with extreme indifference, 'If they have stopped it, let them have their way. When even the Master is gone, what shall I do with money?' The devotees of the Master had decided that they would contribute ten rupees a month for the maintenance of the wife of their guru. But that pious wish did not materialize. Hence the life of the Mother at Kamarpukur was not only solitary, but also one of privation.

Sri Ramakrishna once said to her, 'You will stay at Kamarpukur; you will grow pot-herbs, eat your rice with greens, and call on Hari.' This was not an order, but it was a wish of the Master, a hint of a means of her livelihood. As though to fulfil those words, the Mother had to follow that very pattern of life in those days. There were times when she boiled some rice, but had no salt to savour it with. When after some days the state of affairs at Kamarpukur became known in Calcutta, the devotees took her there. But that was long after. In the meantime the Mother

1. The Holy Mother said: 'Trailokya used to give me seven rupees. After the Master's death, Dinu, the cashier, and all others conspired to stop that money. My relatives, too, who were there, treated me as an ordinary mortal and joined with them.' (*Udbodhan*, Vol. XXVII, pp. 11-12). See also *Sri-Sri Lakshminani devi*.

continued to suffer, without even informing anybody, in the very mud hut which the Master had bequeathed to her; for even then was ringing in her ears that counsel of the Master, 'Mind you, don't put forth your hand to anybody even for a dime. You will have no lack of coarse food and cloth. Once you put forth your hand for a dime from any one, you sell your head to him....Even living on charity is preferable to living in other people's houses. Even if any one of the devotees should offer to keep you in his house with love and respect, you should not give up your own home at Kamarpukur.'

Let us for a moment stop here to look around the Kamarpukur of those days. The Kamarpukur of the boyhood days of the Master must have changed a good deal with the change of time, as is quite natural; still the village did not, in all probability appear new to the Mother's eyes, though there is a world of difference between the Kamarpukur of the later part of 1887 and the Kamarpukur of today (1954). To the south of the Master's house at that time, and contiguous to it, was the house of Shuklal Goswami, known popularly as the Gosain-mahal, which looked something like a land-holder's office establishment with high brick walls around and a brick house in the middle. Near the present well south of the Master's temple was the entrance of the Gosain-mahal which opened to the road on the west. South of the mahal was a small pond on whose bank was the memorial of a suttee of the Pain family. Further south was the guest house of the Lahas. East of the dwelling house of the Lahas, in the centre of the village, is a big pond called the Kamarpukur (tank of the Kamars), on the south-west corner of which the Kamars (lit., black-smiths) still live. Dhani Kamarni, who acted as the midwife at the birth of the Master was born among these people. North of the Master's house is the big pond called the Haldar-pukur or the tank of the Haldars, who no longer live in the village, but have shifted to other places. In the Mother's time the two storeyed

brick house of the Lahas was still habitable and the family was well off. Near the Master's house there were many sweetmeat sellers and starting from the north-eastern corner of the house up to the market place there were rows of shops on either side of the main village road. The Dome (sweeper) quarters along the road, to the north-west of the Master's house, had not been vacated then. And the Yugis (weavers) still had their homesteads between the Master's house and the Haldar-pukur, and they still conducted worship at their Siva temple. The mango grove of Manik Raja had not been denuded, and the tall palm trees still reflected themselves on the calm and transparent waters of the tanks and ponds scattered everywhere.

The Master's homestead then consisted of three mud houses for dwelling purposes, with thatched roofs, standing in a line on the southern side of the village road running from east to west. The house on the east outside the courtyard, served as a parlour. The house in the middle, which was the largest and over which another storey was raised later, was used by Rameshwar, the elder brother of the Master. The westernmost house was used by the Master, and in this was spent the Kamar-pukur phase of the life of the Mother. Between these two dwelling houses was a small door leading to the northern road. At right angles to the Master's bedroom was the shrine of Raghuvira built of mud and straw. The kitchen house along the southern boundary wall had three rooms, one of which was used by the Mother. In the middle of the eastern wall was the entrance to the court-yard. Along this wall, between the entrance and the kitchen was the husking shed where the Master was born.

The altar of Raghuvira and other deities that existed in those days was built by the Master's father Kshudiram Chattopadhyaya with earth carried by himself on his head. At present there are four deities—the image of

Gopala installed by Lakshmi Devi, the white stone emblem of Rameswara Siva brought by Kshudiram from Rameswar, the Raghuvira stone which he got in a dream and a pitcher filled with water, painted with vermilion, and holding mango leaves on its top, which represents the goddess Sitala. About Sitala the Mother said, 'She, indeed, is our family deity. I heard it related how my father-in-law saw in a dream that the Great Mother, in her form of Sitala—a little girl with a robe red as vermilion, was sweeping away all calamities, all the refuse, with brooms in her hand, and holding a pitcher at her waist, sprinkling ambrosial water with the (mango) leaves, thereby bringing peace to all beings by removing all cares.¹ Sitala is only one of the aspects of the Great Mother; that's why there's that pitcher painted with vermilion and containing water for bringing about peace. The water is changed on special days.' The Mother also stated that Raghuvira was the same as Ramachandra whose birthplace was in the north-west; and so the Master's father offered him *khichudi* to suit his north-western taste.

Kamarpukur was then a flourishing, populous, and busy village; and because it was so, it frightened the Mother, full of modesty as she was. Moreover, these people without culture, without liberal ideas and sympathy, remained unmoved at the helpless condition of this widow, and at the same time they lacked any curiosity for imbibing higher ideas from her. It was natural, therefore, for her to be faced with many problems. She continued to wear her bracelets, in obedience to the bidding of the Master. But the rural critics unmindful of such a vision, became increasingly vociferous; and she took these away from her hands. Her second problem was, how to live so far away from the Ganges, a love for whose holy waters

1. In Bengali 'Shital Karchhen', making cool or removing the heat. Sitala is feminine of Sital. Sitala is generally the goddess of pox or similar calamities; but the Mother here gives the word a higher meaning, equating Sitala with the Universal Mother.

was ingrained in her. We saw her going on sacred occasions with village women to the Ganges for a dip, not to speak of her stay on its bank at Dakshineswar for a long thirteen years. Such maladjustments made her a little nervous, and she thought she would one day go for a bath in that river again. Just then she saw the Master approaching along the road in front, followed by Narendra, Baburam, Rakhal, and other devotees. From his blessed feet gushed forth a stream of water which moved before him in waves; and so she thought, 'I see that he himself is everything; from his blessed feet springs the Ganges!' Hence she plucked handfuls of red china-roses from near Raghuvira's shrine and laid them as an offering on the waters of this Ganges. Then the Master told her, 'Don't remove the bracelets from your hands. Don't you know the Vaishnava Tantra?' The Mother replied, 'What is Vaishnava Tantra? I know nothing of it.' Gaur-dasi will come this afternoon,' said the Master, 'you will hear from her.' That very afternoon came Gauri-Ma, who explained to the Mother with the help of the Vaishnava scriptures how there can be no such thing as widowhood for her, since her husband's body was not material but spiritual; furthermore, she was none other than Lakshmi herself, the goddess of fortune and the consort of Vishnu. For her to be without ornaments would mean the deprivation of the whole world of its good things.¹ Later on, when Yogin-Ma went to Kamarpukur, the Mother while describing that incident to her added, 'The Master then stood at the foot of yonder peepul tree. I saw at last the Master disappearing in the body of Naren...Eat the dust of the place, bow down.' When this news travelled from mouth to mouth and reached Swami Vivekananda, he said that it would have been better for him not to have heard of the entry of the Master into his body. However that might have been, one

1. Some Bengali books, for instance, *Gouri-Ma* (pp. 110-12) place this incident at Vrindavan. But the Mother recounted it as we have presented it (*vide Sri Mayer Katha*, part II, p. 148).

cannot but note that the incident made a tremendous impression on the Mother's mind about the mission of the Master and the sanctity of Kamarpukur. She got over the fear of idle gossip and put on the bracelets again; and her cloth also continued to have a thin red border instead of being wholly white. These she never discarded till the end.

The rural critics too, became silent. Such problems like these agitate most the womenfolk, and the solutions also emerge from them. When hostile gossip about the Mother reached the ears of Prasannamayī, daughter of the village landlord, Dharmadas Laha, who had been a widow from early life and was respected by all around for her virtue and wisdom, she folded her hands respectfully and touching her forehead with them in token of salutation, said, 'Gadai (Ramakrishna) and Gadai's wife—they are divine.' The scurrilous women of the village never afterwards opened their mouths.

Although the two problems of the Mother, viz., wearing of ornaments and living near the Ganges, were thus solved, the other complicated ones defied solution for sometime. Soon after she came to the village, she sought the help of Prasannamayī and Dhani Kamarni for securing a companion to be by her side. Prasannamayī gave her the assurance: 'As to that, my dear, you need have no anxiety; my maid-servant will sleep with you at night.' If the maid-servant failed to turn up, Dhani's sister Shankari slept in her house at night, and one of their brothers helped her at odd jobs. Prasannamayī always looked after her needs, and the Mother too, relied on her for advice. Prasannamayī then lived in the Gosain-mahal. She was very devotional in temperament and liked to look after the comforts of guests and brahmins. So she and the Holy Mother spent long hours in talking over religious matters.

In spite of this casual help and oral sympathy, the Mother still felt very lonely and unsafe. She was well prepared to spend her days by tying her worn-out cloth in a hundred knots, digging the earth with a spade, and

growing pot-herbs for her food; but over the uncertainty of the future, family differences, and social indifference and oppression, she had no control whatsoever. True it was that from the psychological point of view she was quite free from such fears after the Master's vision, as she herself said, 'Then, as I began to have visions of the Master, that fear gradually subsided.' These visions again were intimate. One day the Master appeared and said, 'Feed me with *khichudi*.' The Mother thought that as Raghuvira was identical with Ramakrishna, though they differed in form, it would be enough to offer the *khichudi* to the former. She did so, thinking all the while in a spiritual mood that the Master himself was having his meal. But despite this spiritual sublimity, the environmental antagonism continued just as before and caused not a little anxiety.

The question crops up here, 'When the Mother was in these circumstances, what were her people at Jayrambati doing?' We know that they were not particularly well off. Her mother, Shyamasundari Devi, was having a very hard time. Still, when she heard of her daughter's distress, she sent her son, Kalikumar, to Kamarpukur to bring her to Jayrambati. But the Mother refused to go just then. When she did go after some time, Shyamasundari could not check her tears at the sight of her extreme poverty. We like to fancy that this visit was during the annual Jagad-dhatri worship, for which the Mother had an innate attraction and as such, would not have liked to miss the occasion. Shyamasundari Devi took this occasion to hold her back, but the daughter replied, 'Now, I am going to Kamarpukur, Mother. Afterwards it'll be as He ordains.'

In the course of a short time, a great change came over the Kamarpukur family. The Mother's nephews, Ramlal and Shivaram and her niece, Lakshmi Devi then lived generally at Dakshineswar, though they very often came to their village home to stay there for short periods. We have noted that Ramlal (or Ramlal-dada) was somewhat indifferent towards the Mother. But this cannot be said

about Shivaram or Shibu-dada, as he was generally called. Shibu-dada received from the Mother his first alms after his investiture with the sacred thread, and so he regarded her more as his god-mother than as an aunt and the Mother too, treated him as a son. Long after, when the Mother was permanently residing at Jayrambati, Shibu-dada sat for his lunch at Kamarpukur one day; but when he had half finished, the desire grew in him to eat something from his god-mother's hand; and so he walked to Jayrambati and after having been fed by Holy Mother returned to Kamarpukur with a betel in his mouth given by her. We have many such instances of the Mother's affection for all of them.

Once during this period, Lakshmi Devi and many others were present at Kamarpukur. Till then the family was a joint one. But as misfortune would have it, the family was broken up by partition. Lakshmi Devi was a Vaishnava by temperament. Sometimes she sang Vaishnava songs inside the house with a sweet voice, which attracted people of a similar faith. The Mother could not be quite easy about this. She remembered that when Lakshmi Devi sang in this way before the Master, imitating fully the gestures and postures of professional singers, the Master, while enjoying it, was amused; but he warned the Mother, 'That's Lakshmi's temperament; don't you tread on her footsteps and throw your modesty to the winds.'² Besides this difference, the divergence of outlook in daily talks and actions between the Holy Mother and the rest of the family became more pronounced as days rolled on. The Mother preferred to spend the rest of her days peacefully in the thought of the Master, while around her others swirled the currents and cross-currents of the world into whose vortex they wanted to draw the Mother as well. The Mother remained unperturbed and unruffled, never uttering a word of protest. But the Chatterji family did nothing to avert the split that is usual under such circumstances. Thus, despite the passivity on the one side,

the aggressiveness on the other threw the Mother out of the main body. One day, on her return from Jayram-bati, the Mother found that Ramlal-dada had left for Dakshineswar with the others after making some arrangement for the daily worship of Raghuvira. To her share had fallen the little cottage of the Master; she entered therein determined to keep up its sanctity.

On a study of the Mother's life we come to learn that commencing from her arrival at Kamarpukur in September 1887, she lived there for about nine months (up to April, 1888), after which the devotees brought her to Calcutta. From Calcutta she again went to Kamarpukur in February next and lived there almost for a similar period. Most probably, the subsequent periods of her stay there were never so long, though she came to live there quite a number of times.¹ It is not possible to determine definitely the time of various incidents that took place during those periods of stay. In the account so far presented, we have made no attempt to date the incidents exactly; and in what follows, too, we shall not try to do more than indicate the dates in a general way.

During the Mother's stay at Kamarpukur, the visits from the devotees were few and far between. Of course, most of them were too poor to undertake the pilgrimage; but the few who went there were received heartily by the Mother, for the meetings of persons that are akin and familiar were always delightful. Such visits rather relieved the monotony of her otherwise dull village life. But all visits were not welcome; on the contrary, some were a source of trouble. Once at least, the Mother had to face such an embarrassing situation. Harish, a devotee of the Master was a constant visitor at the first Math of

1. From the notes of Master Mahashaya we gather that she lived at Kamarpukur during the following periods: End of October 1890; February, and July to October 1891, July of 1892, January and July of 1893; 13th May 1895; November 1895 to January 1896; May, and Durgapuja days (September-October) of 1897.

the Ramakrishna Order at Baranagore, and this frightened his wife. With a view to counteracting this tendency to renunciation, she surreptitiously applied drugs and charms, which brought about a certain derangement of his mind. While still under the influence of those drugs, Harish visited the Mother at Kamarpukur. The Mother could at once see through the mind of the man and hence wrote to the Math to take him away. Accordingly, Swamis Saradananda and Niranjanananda started for Kamarpukur. But before they could reach there, Harish's lunacy grew out of control, and the Mother had to devise her own remedy for this. We present the incident in her own words:

'At this time Harish came and stayed at Kamarpukur. One day, I was returning from a neighbouring house. As I stepped into the courtyard, Harish began chasing me. Harish was not in his senses then; his wife had drugged him and madness had followed upon it. There was nobody else in the house; so where could I escape? In a hurry, I began circling round the barn of paddy (near the Master's birthplace). But he would not give up the chase. After going round for seven times, I could run no longer. Then I stood firm working myself up to my full stature (lit., assuming my own form). And then, placing my knee on his chest and taking hold of his tongue, I slapped him on his cheeks so hard that he began to gasp for breath. My fingers became red.'

It is difficult now to ascertain in what sense the Mother used the words 'my full stature.' Many believe that since the Mother was an incarnation of the Mother of the Universe, it was possible for her to assume all kinds of divine forms and attitudes; and in the present context, she became Vagala to punish with heroic hands the demon in the person of Harish.¹ There is no reason why a devotee should not believe this; but even

1. *Vagala* is one of the ten *Mahavidyas*, forms of the Great Mother. In that form she killed a demon in the very same way as the Mother punished Harish.

a matter-of-fact man will be surprised to see how the Mother, who was noted all along for her modesty, meekness and mercy, could at a critical moment be on her mettle. When we look more closely into such incidents of her life, it strikes us that the poet who penned the line in the *Chandi*, 'Of all beings in the three worlds (heaven, earth and hell), in you alone, O goddess, is seen a kindness of heart combined with heroism in fight,' was truly a seer. That punishment cured Harish not only for the time being. Later he fled to Vrindaban on the arrival of Swami Niranjanananda, and there became fully normal after some time.

One winter morning, in the beginning of 1888, Krishnabhavini Devi, wife of the great devotee Balaram-Babu, and her mother Matangini Devi, came to the Master's birthplace from Antpur with a brahmin girl and a faithful man as escort. As devout Hindus they knew that their guru's household, and that of a brahmin too, should not be burdened on any account, and hence they placed sufficient money in the Mother's hands for making a suitable offering to Raghuvira, whose *prasada* only they would eat. The Mother made suitable arrangements for their comfort, and on the fourth day she took them to Jayrambati, where, too, they spent three nights and then left for Calcutta by way of Kamarpukur¹.

In the midst of fear and poverty, the Holy Mother kept burning the lamp of her spiritual ministry. It was probably during her second stay at Kamarpukur. There lived a monk from Orissa in a cottage attached to the

1. The incident had an important bearing on the Mother's subsequent life. It can be inferred that, though the Mother tried her utmost to hide her poverty and helplessness from the devotees, their loving eyes penetrated into the truth; and therefore, after their return to Calcutta they told the other devotees all these facts. As a result the Mother was soon brought to Calcutta. The other version is that uncle Prasanna, who then lived in Calcutta, divulged the facts to Ramlal, Golap-ma, and others, and thus the devotees were stirred to action. In any case, Golap-Ma took a leading part in this matter.

outer wall of Gosain-mahal, inside which dwelt Prasannamayī who looked after the monk's needs. He had incurred the displeasure of some hot-headed and well-connected young men of the locality, so that he was on the point of leaving the village, when the Mother came to his help. The monk commanded the respect of the common folk; and thus with their help she proceeded to build for him a cottage at the south-west corner of Haldar-pukur. The rainy season was then imminent and the sky looked threatening. Hence the Mother prayed fervently with folded hands, 'O Lord, kindly forbear, kindly forbear! Let his thatch be completed and then you can pour as much as you like.' After the monk had been given a place to lay his head in, the Mother used to supply him with his foodstuff, though she had hardly sufficient for herself; and inquired of him every morning and evening, 'Father monk, how are you, dear?' But the monk did not live there for long; for, as Providence would have it, he expired soon in that cottage.

Though the Mother was in extremely indigent condition in the beginning, matters improved a little in course of time. The devotees, coming to know of her difficulties, organized what help they could. In addition, her share of the land at Shihar, left as a trust by Master in the name of the family deity, and the Lakshmi-jala land which came down from the Master's father, Kshudiram, as a heritage, yielded sufficient paddy not only for herself but also for some charity. Towards the end of the period we are discussing now, there was a maidservant named Sagarer Ma (Sagar's mother) who helped the Mother in her domestic work. From her it has been gathered that she used to do the shopping for the Mother. A portion of whatever the Mother cooked at noon, she kept in a pot for Sagarer Ma, and when the woman came, she handed it over to her saying, 'Put this in your mouth first and drink some water, and after that begin your work.' During the three days that the goddess Durga is worshipped annually in Bengal,

special worship was done and offerings made to Sitala by the Chatterjis at their Kamarpukur house. Brahmins were fed on this occasion. When the time for the feast came, the Mother used to say, 'Shibu (Shibu-dada), you spread the leaf-plates and serve salt and water, while I serve rice on all the leaves for the brahmins.' Sagarer Ma further says, 'Hers was the store of Lakshmi (goddess of wealth), as it were; nothing ran short. Whatever surplus there remained, she lovingly gave away to us the next day.' Over and above all this, the Holy Mother fed a number of guests.

We have noticed the Mother's diligence at Dakshineswar, Shyampukur and Cossipore. At Kamarpukur too, the same assiduity was in evidence, rather it increased because of the manifold responsibilities she was burdened with. She got together all that was necessary for cooking food, cooked it, and offered it to Raghuvira with all punctiliousness. If Shibu-dada happened to be at Kamarpukur he performed the worship, otherwise somebody else did it. Before the daily worship commenced, the Mother finished her bath in the Haldar-pukur and started cooking on two ovens, and this was finished before the sun moved away from the verandah (i.e., before noon), it being unbecoming to offer food to the deities after mid-day.

Of a truth, the Mother tried her best to follow the Master's wishes—she was ready to wear herself out at Kamarpukur through toil, tears, privation, and disease. But there is a limit to endurance whether physical or mental. Where the environment is wholly unhelpful or antagonistic, one with a sense of self-respect cannot continue spiritual practices long in a course of strenuous adjustment and compromise. Differences of outlook were there to be sure; in addition, the moral and spiritual atmosphere of the village was unbearable for her. The way in which the influential young men of the village misbehaved towards the monk from Orissa, disregarding the intervention of such a venerable lady as Prasannamayī,

set the Mother thinking much about her own future. And on top of all this came the insistent calls from her children in Calcutta, which ultimately proved too strong for her affectionate heart. Ultimately, Kamarpukur ceased to be her main place of residence. This does not, however, mean that she neglected her husband's bequest; it only means that she took up her task in a wider and more effective sense. And though she did not permanently stay at Kamarpukur, she spent money for the proper maintenance of the Master's cottage. If any devotee went that way, she reminded him of its sanctity and advised him to spend the night in it, so that he might imbibe some of its holiness. She helped her nephew Ramlal with money in putting a new storey over their own dwelling house. And she bestowed particular care on the worship of Raghuvira and spent money for the purpose.

Her latter-day disciples were curious for details about her leaving Kamarpukur and plied her with various questions. One devotee asked her, 'Mother, you don't so much as visit the Master's house; when you come to the village from Calcutta, you go straight to your father's house. Are you, in this, treading in the footsteps of your predecessors?' The Mother laughed heartily and replied, 'Not so, my son! Can I forget the Master's house? Shibu is my god-son. But the Master is now no longer in the physical body; I am pained if I go there. That's why I don't go.' The irremediable pangs of separation was there to be sure, but to that were added the external maladjustments owing to the antagonism, negligence, and inequities of the people around her, of which she seldom spoke as it hurt her to expose others' faults. On rare occasions only she opened out her mind a little. To a boy devotee who attended on her, she said, 'When after the Master's passing away I moved about here and there for sometime and then went to live at Kamarpukur, my relatives seemed to be indifferent towards me. And coming to learn of the high-handedness of the villagers, my

mother brought me here (to Jayrambati); she did not allow me to live at Kamarpukur any more. From that time on I have been living with my brothers through stress and strain. And now, again, they complain, "She does not look after us." The human mind is strange indeed.'

WITH THE DEVOTEES

It took quite a long time for the news of the Mother's misery at Kamarpukur to percolate to the Calcutta devotees. The young monks were then travelling here and there impelled by the desire for a life of absolute surrender to Providence; they, therefore, knew nothing of this. Swami Saradananda said afterwards, 'We could not then imagine that the Mother could not even get a pinch of salt.' After eight or nine months, when the devotees learnt the true state of affairs, they finalized their plan to accommodate her in Calcutta and then transmitted their request to her. The Mother knew what was in the hearts of the devotees. She was aware of the irrationality of rejecting the call of such loving followers and continuing in the adverse atmosphere of Kamarpukur. Yet she could not make up her mind without considering fully a few intricate questions. The Master had reminded her off and on that modesty is the highest virtue of a woman. Would she be able to maintain her habitual seclusion in the new surroundings?

The second question was more serious, or rather it was the first question in a more complicated setting. Her travels between Jayrambati and Dakshineswar were nothing uncommon from the social point of view, so long as the Master was there. But now that he was no more, could the Mother proceed to Calcutta overriding the prejudices and narrow notions of village folk? The Mother herself related how the problem was solved: When my coming here (Calcutta) was being talked of, after the Master's passing away, I was at Kamarpukur.* Many there said, "Good heavens! They are young boys, how can you possibly live with them?" I knew in my heart, of course, that I would live here. Still one has to take account of public opinion; and so I consulted many. Some again, said, "Why, of course, you should go; they are all disciples."

I simply listened to all that they said. Now, there is an old widow (Prasannamayi) in our village whose opinion is respected because she is very virtuous and intelligent. I went to her at last and asked, "What do you say?" She replied, "Fancy! You will certainly go. They are disciples, as good as your sons. How can such a question arise? There can be no two opinions about your going." Hearing of this, others also consented. Then I came.'

Sometime in May, 1888, the Mother came to Balaram Babu's house in Calcutta. Either at this time or near about this, we get a profound insight into the inwardness and God-absorption of the Mother. That day, as she sat for meditation on the roof of Balaram Babu's house, she entered into samadhi. When she emerged from it, she said to Yogin-Ma, 'I saw, I was in a far-off place. All were treating me there with the utmost love. I became very beautiful. The Master was there, and with great tenderness they made me sit by his side. I can't describe the bliss that I enjoyed. When I regained my consciousness a little, I saw the body lying here. Then the thought came to me, "How can I enter into this ugly body?" I had not the least desire to resume it. At long last, I managed to get into it; and then consciousness returned to it.' It appears to us as though, the discord between the intrinsic divinity of the Mother and her physical vestures became intensely vivid through that vision, at the same time that she became more fully aware of her real identity and felt that through God's dispensation she had to work for the good of the world in and through such uninviting environment.

In a few days, the garden house of Nilambar Babu on the Ganges at Belur was engaged by the devotees, and the Holy Mother went there with Yogin-Ma, Golap-Ma, and some monks as her companions and attendants. She stayed there for six months. Her meditateness was as intense now as before. One day, as she sat in meditation on the roof with her two woman companions, she became merged

in deep *samadhi*, so that her companions, on rising from their seats, found her body stiff and motionless. After a long time she said while descending to the normal plane, ‘O Yogen, where are my hands, where are my feet?’ The companions, while pressing her hands and feet to make her conscious of them, said, ‘Here, indeed, are your hands and here your feet.’ Still it took quite a long time for her to regain normal consciousness. When the term of the lease expired, the Mother returned to Balaram Babu’s house at the beginning of November, 1888, from where she started for Puri after a couple of days.

This pilgrimage attracted quite a number of devotees; and Swamis Brahmananda, Yogananda and Saradananda, as also Yogin-Ma, Golap-Ma, Yogin-Ma’s mother, and Lakshmi Devi went with her. The coastal railroad had not yet been constructed; hence they went by steamer from Calcutta to Chandbali (7th November), from where they proceeded by a launch to Cuttack, and by cart to Puri. Arriving at Puri, they visited Lord Jagannatha immediately, for an inauspicious period would commence from the next day. Then the Holy Mother and the women went to live in a house of Balaram Babu, called the Kshetra-basir Math or a resort for the dwellers in the holy place; the monks had their own separate place. The Mother stayed here for a little more than two months, returning to Calcutta in the middle of January next year. We shall relate here some incidents of the Puri visit.

As the Master had never been to Puri, the Mother carried his picture under her cloth so as to show him Jagannatha by showing the deity to his picture; for she believed that ‘the picture and its prototype were the same.’ About Jagannatha she said, ‘I saw Jagannatha as the best of all persons sitting on an altar of gems with myself serving Him as a handmaid.’ At another time she said that she saw the god as Siva.¹ On her visit to the temple, she

1. There are divergent theories about the identity of the image. It seems that the temple changed hands and the deity too, was differently conceived.

was delighted to see the great concourse of pilgrims; and with tears of joy she thought within herself, 'Hey-day! good luck! so many people will be freed (through this vision of the Lord)!' But the next moment it occurred to her, 'No, only those rare few who have no worldly desire will be freed.' When she shared her thought with Yogin-Ma, the latter, too, concurred.

At Puri the Mother's characteristic humility was revealed in bold relief. Govinda Shingari, the Panda¹ of Balaram Babu's family, thought that in keeping with the honour of that family a palanquin should be arranged for carrying their guru's wife to the temple. When he placed this proposal before the Mother, she said 'No, Govinda, you will walk in front as a guide and I shall follow you as a poor humble woman to visit Jagannatha.' It was thus that she visited the temple. She also visited all the noted places at Puri, and she spent long hours regularly in meditation at the temple of Lakshmi.

From Puri she returned to Calcutta on the 12th January, 1889; and the next day, she bathed in the Ganges at Nimtola. She visited the Kali temple at Kalighat on the 22nd. On the 5th February she went with Swamis Vivekananda, Saradananda, Yogananda and Premananda, as also Master Mahashaya, Sannyal Mahashaya and many others to Antpur, the birth-place of Swami Premananda. After spending about a week there, she left for Kamarpukur by a bullock-cart. Master Mahashaya and some others accompanied her.

Her stay at this time at Kamarpukur was almost as long as the first one. Then she came to Calcutta, and took up her residence on the banks of the Ganga at Belur in the rented house of Raju Gomasta. From there she went on the 5th March (1890) to Master Mahashaya's house at

1. A brahmin who guides the pilgrims and officiates as their priest at a holy place.

Kambuliatala (Calcutta), from where she went on a pilgrimage to Gaya with the old Swami Advaitananda. After the passing away of his mother, the Master had asked the Holy Mother to go to Gaya to offer oblation at the well-known Vishnu-pada (Footprints of Vishnu). The Mother now carried out that command. She took this opportunity to visit Baidyanatha on the way, and from Gaya she went to Bodh Gaya also. On the completion of this pilgrimage, she returned to Master Mahashaya's house on the 2nd April.¹ Just then Balaram Babu lay gravely ill. The Mother remembered well his services to the Master and the latter's love for him; and, therefore, she shifted to his house to be at his bed-side during his last days. The great devout soul passed away on the 13th April, 1890.

A month later she moved over to a rented house on the Ganges at Ghushuri (Belur), near the local crematorium. When she was there, an irresistible desire to go out in quest of the Unknown was roused in Swami Vivekananda's heart, and he decided to leave the monastery and wander about the country for some time in quest of illumination. But he felt strongly inclined to seek the Mother's blessing before he started. Coming, therefore, to her one day in July, he made a long and reverential prostration, sang to her some devotional songs, and then expressed his heart's desire: 'Mother, if I can become a man in the true sense of the term, then only shall I return; otherwise this will be my last farewell.' Taken aback, the Mother said, 'You don't say so!' The Swami said, 'No, no, by your grace I shall soon come back.' The Mother could understand the depth of her son's aspiration, and to her divine vision appeared clearly the picture of his bright future; hence she blessed him heartily and asked him to return after enlightenment and fulfilment of his mission.

1. The sequence of events from Puri onward, follows the unpublished memoirs of Master Mahashaya, with which the foot-note on p. 154 of *Shri Shri Mayer Katha*, part I, as also the account in it on pp. 317-18, are strikingly in accord.

Immensely inspired by her good wishes, Swamiji left for a tour of the holy places of India.

The Mother lived in that house till the month of Bhadra (August-September). Then she had to be taken to Saurindra Thakur's house at Baranagore across the river for treatment for dysentery from which she was suffering. The then Ramakrishna Math was not far from this house, so that it was easier for the monks to arrange for her comfort and medical care. After she became well she went to the house of Balaram Babu, preparatory to her departure for Jayrambati by way of Kamarpukur after the Durga worship (sometime in October). Of the events of her stay there,¹ the details available are not very clear, though an account of what happened during the Jagad-dhatri worship that year (10th November, 1891) shows clearly that the Mother had then been fully established in her Motherhood, and that her divinity, too, had become acknowledged among intimate acquaintances. At that time Swami Saradananda went to Jayrambati to attend the worship of the deity, and with him went Sannyal Mahashaya, Haramohan Mitra, Kalikrishna (Swami Virajananda), Golap-Ma, and Yogin-Ma. They reached Burdwan by train and went from there to Kamarpukur by bullock-cart. After they had seen the Master's birth-place, they covered the rest of the way to Jayrambati on foot. The Mother's joy knew no bounds at the sight of her beloved children. She was ever busy attending to their needs. Every day she dressed the vegetables and prepared special dishes for them, and then served the food and sat by them to see that they were fully satisfied. Her affection touched the deepest chords of their hearts. She was more particularly attentive to the young novitiate, Kalikrishna, who

1. Some more accounts will be given in our chapter on *Girishchandra Ghosh*. A letter dated the 3rd Falguna, 1297 Bengali era, (or February, 1891), written to Master Mahashaya from Kamarpukur, reveals that the Mother had been there even earlier and had been hearing the *Gita* from her brother Abhay, while her niece Lakshmi Devi had gone to Dakshineswar for a dip in the Ganges.

was still in his teens. She received him as a veritable son and kissed him by touching his chin.¹ He ran errands for the elders and had free access everywhere. He had often to go to the inner apartments to fetch betels, tiffin, or fire for their tobacco pipes. As it is not customary to hand over fire directly to a son,² the Holy Mother placed the burning charcoal or cow-dung cake on the ground for him to pick it up with a pair of tongs.

Shyamasundari Devi was addressed by them as grandmother. She was simple and diligent; there was no end to her daily round of duties. Tending the cattle, feeding the labourers, husking paddy, and such other tasks closely followed one another; and yet she was all smiles for everyone—there was no sign of anger or annoyance. The Mother, also, was always at her side. Grandmother looked upon the devotees as her grandchildren for whose welfare she was extremely solicitous. The call 'grandma' pleased her as nothing else. This natural love for the grandchildren continued all through her life; and even those who went to Jayrambati much later, had an unforgettable touch of her warm heart. Throughout the year she would be busy laying by things for her grandchildren and declaring, 'Mine is a family of God and His devotees.'

At that time grandmother narrated many incidents of the Master's life to her grandchildren Kalikrishna and others. One day Haridas Vairagi, a roving minstrel of Desra, came and sang to the tune of his violin:

What a delightful news it is, O Uma (dear daughter)!

(Dear me)! I hear from people—say if that is true,

O Siva's wife—

That you've got the name Annapurna (filling all with food) at
Banaras,

1. The Bengali mothers touch the chins of their grown up children with the tips of their right hand fingers, and then kiss those fingers. The Holy Mother followed this custom in the case of very young disciples. The word kiss in this volume means this only.

2. A dead body is cremated by setting fire to it. Because of this evil association mothers do not directly hand over fire to their children.

O Aparna (Uma), when I married you (to Siva),
 Siva went about begging for morsels.
 Today what a delightful news I hear, O giver of fortune!
 Are you the Goddess of the Universe seated at the left of the God
 of the Universe?

Mad and eccentric they called my naked one (Siva),
 Abuses galore have I endured thereafter in houses innumerable;
 Now sit door-keepers at the naked one's door, they say;
 And Indra, Chandra, and Death get no interview.

Siva had the Himalayas as his abode;
 Days there were when begging brought his daily food;
 Now he rolls in Kubera's wealth.
 Has fortune smiled on him by your good luck?

There's indeed more affluence now, methinks,
 Else how is Gauri (Uma) so proud?
 She opens not her eyes at her own son,
 And turns her face at Radhika's (poet's) name.

The song was, so to say, an exact replica of the Mother's life; and so every one heard it with rapt attention. Yogin-Ma and Golap-Ma who were in the inner apartment wanted to hear the song again, and it was sung again. When at last the beggar left with some presents, grandmother commented, 'Forsooth, my dears, in those days all called my son-in-law mad, cursed my Sarada's fortune, and flung many a hard word at me; so I felt like dying. And see today, what a number of boys and girls of good families are worshipping at Sarada's feet thinking her to be a goddess!'

In accordance with the custom of the family the worship of Jagad-dhatri continued for three days. The Mother was ever busy cooking and doing other works. But at the evening service every day she stood with folded hands before the Deity or fanned Her with the *chamara* (yak's tail). People from all around were fed on these days, and on two nights there were *yatras*.

Three days after the worship was over, Swami Saradananda and others were laid up with malaria. The Mother became greatly anxious and went on repeating,

“Mother gracious! What’s in store? The boys are all suffering in their beds.’ During her moments of leisure she stood at the door-way looking silently at her sons. Milk could not easily be had in that village; still she moved from door to door collecting it by ounces till she got enough for their diet. As soon as they recovered, they decided that, since their continued stay was so very taxing to the Mother, they had better start for Calcutta without further delay. But the Mother expostulated, ‘You’ll go only after fuller recovery and after gaining more strength.’ Nevertheless, they started in bullock-carts on the appointed day. As they were leaving, the Mother looked on wistfully from the backdoor with tearful eyes. Golap-Ma and Yogin-Ma, too, could not restrain their tears; and from Kalikrishna’s eyes a few drops rolled down unawares. After they had gone some distance he looked back to find that the Mother had followed them and was standing on the bank of the Badujye-pukur with eyes fixed on them. The wheels of their carts crackled on till the Mother was totally out of sight. Kalikrishna kept on thinking all the way, ‘Whoever could imagine from what one heard that the Mother is really such a mother, that she would take by storm one’s heart and soul in this way and make one dearer than the dearest! I loved my own mother very fondly to be sure; but here is one who was and will be a mother for all lives past and future—one’s own mother for all time.’

From the October of 1891 to the middle of 1893, i.e., for about two and a half years, the Mother stayed in the country-side; and then she came to live at Belur in the garden house of Nilambar Babu, where among others Swami Trigunatitananda attended to her needs. He was very mindful of his duties to the minutest detail. For instance, he used to spread a clean cloth below a *shephalika* (weeping nyctanthes) tree, so that the flowers dropping from it at night might not get spoiled by touching the ground. He then collected these together for the Mother to be used during her worship.

One of the foremost events of this period was the performance of the *panchatapa* (five-fire) austerity by the Mother. After the Master left the body, the Holy Mother's dislike for life became so very strong that though she performed her duties mechanically, she kept on thinking that as the Master was no longer in flesh and blood, her life was altogether a meaningless thing. She had no taste for anything, nor any liking for gossip. In order to remove that sorrow, the devotees took her to different places of pilgrimage. When she was at Banaras, there used to come to her a nun who hailed from Nepal and who was versed in diverse esoteric practices. Studying the Mother's mental condition she advised her saying, 'Mother, you undertake the *panchatapa*.' That directed the Mother's thoughts to a new channel. It occurred to her that if the outer fires could be made unendurably hot, the internal fire might be subdued a little. Moreover, the belief began to grow in her that, after all, her life might not be quite useless; for in her ears were still ringing the words of the Master, 'You must not die; you have to stay on.' She was still in that vacillating frame of mind when supernormal visions or divine directions egged her on to undertake that austerity. At Kamarpukur she had seen with open eyes a girl of eleven or twelve years of age moving about her—sometimes in front of her and sometimes behind, with hair unkempt, and with an ochre cloth and a necklace of *rudraksha* beads on her person. It looked, as though the Mother's extreme abhorrence for the world consequent on the Master's demise had taken the form of that young nun. The Mother had another vision, also very frequently; a monk, with clean shaven face and head, suggested to her to undertake the *panchatapa*. At first she ignored such visions; but the Sannyasi (monk) persisted in his advice, till at last the desire for *panchatapa* became active in her mind during her stay at Belur. She did not know what it meant actually; and hence she consulted Yogin-Ma, who said encouragingly that she too would undertake it.

Arrangements were accordingly made for both of them. The roof of the one-storeyed portion of their house was covered with earth, and over this at intervals of about seven and a half feet (five cubits) four big fires were set ablaze in a square with cow-dung cakes, and overhead was the fiery summer sun. The Mother bathed in the Ganges and then came to the fires, the sight of which filled her with some dismay. But Yogin-Ma cheered her saying, 'Get in Mother, why are you afraid?' So with a silent prayer to the Master she got in, and Yogin-Ma sat by her. Once she was there, it seemed as though the fire had lost its heat. Meditation and *japa* continued within the circle of fires, till the morning sun slowly reached the zenith, poured down its scorching rays awhile, and then as slowly sank below the western horizon. The Mother and Yogin-Ma then came out. This went on for seven days till the scarred skin of the body looked quite black. The mental fire was then appeased a little; and the ochre-clothed girl departed for ever.

The Mother stood the terrible fiery ordeal. But when speaking of this incident in later days, she did not seem to attach any great importance to it. For instance, when a devotee asked, 'What's the need of austerity?' The Mother answered, 'Penance is necessary. Even Parvati did it for Siva. These are undertaken for the good of the people. Otherwise they will say, "Why, she eats, drinks, and lives just like any other person." As for *panchatapa* and such other things, these are feminine practices, just like the observance of vows, you know. The Master undertook all kinds of practices. He used to say, "I have made the die; you now shape your metal on them." ' An intimate devotee asked, 'Where is the need for your doing so much penance?' The Mother replied, 'For the sake of you all, my son. How can the boys do so much? Hence I have to.'

The *panchatapa* might have mitigated to some extent the internal grief; but still the need for continuing in the body

was not becoming quite obvious to her. That conviction, too, was not long in coming as the result of a unique vision. It was a full moon night. The bright moonbeams were dancing on the white ripples of the Ganges like molten silver. The Mother came out to the head of the steps leading to the water to enjoy that beauty without any other thought in her mind. Suddenly Sri Ramakrishna emerged from behind and rushed down by her into the river, and his body of pure spirit got dissolved in the holy waters of the river, which has been washing away the sins of millions of people for ages. The sight made the Mother's hair stand on end. Dumbfounded, she kept her eyes fixed there, when all of a sudden, Swami Vivekananda burst upon the view from nowhere and shouting with elation, 'Glory unto Ramakrishna' went on sprinkling handfuls of that water over the millions of people standing around, who, before her very eyes, became freed from this world at the very touch of that water. The vision was so vivid and life-like, that for days together she could not step into the Ganges for bathing for fear of touching the Master's divine body with her feet. This transcendent vision had another effect; it impressed on her mind indelibly and for ever the true meaning of the new avatar's life; and from a consideration of its implication she came to believe that she had an important part to play in fulfilling his mission.

The intense desire for doing good that was thus taking shape in the Mother's mind through various visions and thoughts, expressed itself in its full beauty in this very house through a touching incident. Nag Mahashaya¹ believed the Mother to be none other than the Mother of the Universe. The day that he came to the Mother's house, happened to be the eleventh day of the moon when orthodox Hindus do not eat rice, curries, lentil soups, etc., but take other and lighter things according to convenience. The Mother had sat for her scanty repast when the maid-servant

1. Durgacharan Nag, a devotee of the Master.

announced, 'Mother, who is Nag Mahashaya? He is bowing down to you; but he is striking his head so hard (against the pavement) that, methinks, it will bleed. Maharaj (Swami Yogananda) entreats him so earnestly from behind to stop, but there's no answer, as though he is unconscious. Is he mad, Mother?' In those days men devotees were not allowed to appear directly before the Mother but they bowed by touching the steps with their heads, and the maidservant went in to announce, 'Mother, they are saluting you.' On the present day no sooner the Mother heard about this self-forgetful devotee, than filled with affection she said to the woman, 'My dear, ask Yogen. (Swami Yogananda) to send him here.' When Yogananda himself led Nag Mahashaya by his hand to the Mother's presence, she noticed that his forehead was swollen, his eyes full of tears, and his steps unsteady. Because of his tears he could not see the Mother; it was as though he was no longer in the conscious world. The Mother was so much moved by this sight that she forgot her natural shyness and taking hold of the hand of her devout son made him sit by her. Nag Mahashaya was still crying, 'Mother, Mother'—as though in a state of delirium, and yet he was otherwise so peaceful and unobtrusive! The Mother wiped away his tears. There were the articles of food in front—roots, fruits, and sweets. The Mother ate a little and with her own hand put some of these into Nag Mahashaya's mouth. His mind, however, was then so completely indrawn that he could not eat these, but went on repeating as before, 'Mother, Mother!' and sat holding her feet with both hands. The other women suggested, 'Mother, your meal is being spoiled. Let us ask Maharaj (Yogananda) to take him away. But the Mother replied, 'Let him alone! Let him calm down a little.' The Mother patted his head and body and uttered in his ears the name of the Master for some time; and then only he came round. The Mother now resumed her meal and went on feeding Nag Mahashaya, too, like a child. When he was being led

down after the meal, he kept on telling the Mother, 'Not I, not I; but you, you.' The Mother drew the attention of those present there to this and remarked, 'Look what perfect wisdom!' Overpowered with the joy of receiving food from the Mother's own hand, Nag Mahashaya said further, 'Mother is kinder than Father (Master), Mother is kinder than Father.' The Mother loved this son of hers very deeply and had the confidence that he could do everything for her.

There is another example of the Mother's affectionate dealings with Nag Mahashaya, which belongs to another period of time, and most probably to a different place, but is being introduced here for convenience of treatment. Putting on a dirty and worn out piece of cloth and with a basket of mangoes from his own garden on his head, Nag Mahashaya came to the Mother's house. The mangoes were of a special quality and some of them were marked with lime. At the Mother's house he went on moving about with the basket on his head. He would not give it to anybody, nor would he speak. At last Swami Yogananda sent word: 'Tell Mother that Nag Mahashaya has come with mangoes; he says nothing nor does he hand it over to anybody.' The Mother on hearing this said, 'Send him here.' Nag Mahashaya came with the basket on head and when a Brahmachari took it down, he made his obeisance at the Mother's feet, who noticed that he was as unconscious as on the previous occasion. He was repeating the name of the Master and while calling on the Mother tears were rolling down his chest. As the Master's worship had not been finished, some of the mangoes were cut and offered to him. When, after the worship, Yogin-Ma gave to the Mother on a leaf a few mango pieces, she took some of them and told Golap-Ma, 'Bring another *sal* leaf.' On that leaf she placed some of the pieces and asked Nag Mahashaya to eat them. But who was to do so? He had no physical sense; the hands were as good as paralysed. The Mother took hold of his hand and entreated him to

eat, but he simply took a piece and began rubbing it on his head. Helplessly the Mother had to ask some one to come up and lead him down. There he kept on striking his head on the steps till the forehead became swollen, and at long last, when consciousness returned, he left for home without partaking of the consecrated food.

When the Mother was living on the top of a godown near the Ganges in Calcutta, Nag Mahashaya visited her there. She gave him some *prasada* on a *sal* leaf. Through an intensity of devotion he looked upon everything touched by the sacred *prasada* as *prasada* itself and gulped down the leaf also. On another occasion the Mother gave him a piece of cloth, which he considered too sacred to be dishonoured by wearing; and so he tied it on his head as a turban. The Mother's affection for Nag Mahashaya found expression in a hundred ways even after his demise. A devotee one day noticed on entering the Mother's bedroom that she had hung up on the walls the pictures of Swami Vivekananda, Girishchandra Ghosh, and Nag Mahashaya, each of which she approached one after the other, wiped with a piece of cloth, put a mark of sandal paste, and then patted it with her hand. Last of all she said, keeping her eyes on Nag Mahashaya's picture, 'Quite a number of devotees come; but not another like this one.'

After passing some months at the garden house of Nilambar Babu, the Mother, most probably, went to Jayrambati. Then, when in the month of Paush (December-January) 1893-94, Balaram Babu's daughter Bhuvanmohini died, her mother Krishnabhavini Devi became so stricken with grief and so emaciated through disease that she had to be sent out for a change to Kailwar, about eighteen miles east of Arrah, in Bihar. But Krishnabhavani Devi agreed to go on condition that the Holy Mother would be with her. Accordingly, the Mother came to Calcutta in the beginning of 1894 and left for Kailwar with Krishnabhavani and her mother, as also Golap-Ma, Swamis Saradananda, Yogananda, and Trigunatitananda, and Swami Yogananda's

father Sri Navinchandra Chaudhury. They stayed there for two months. At Kailwar the Mother was delighted to see the wild deer moving in formation like a triangle and shooting away like arrows at the slightest sense of fear. She also noticed a strange device of the local people. Lest the jackals should drink of the date juice from the pots hung from the small palms, they hid themselves in pits in the ground, covering their heads with earthen vessels, and when the jackals approached, they drove them away by raising a cry.

After Kailwar the Mother was again at Jayrambati, where she, as also her mother fell ill, and Akshayakumar Sen, a devotee of the Master, called in a physician for their treatment. Then she came to stay at Belur till she was invited by Matangini Devi, mother of Swami Premananda and Krishnabhavini Devi, to be present at their home at Antpur where they were restarting the worship of Durga after a lapse of several years. They were all overjoyed to have her in their midst, and along with her Sri Shantiram Ghosh (brother of Swami Premananda) Yogin-Ma, Golap-Ma, and Saradananda. After the celebrations, the Mother left for Jayrambati (October, 1894).

She returned to Calcutta in the beginning (probably February) of 1895. The desire again rose in her mind to go on a pilgrimage to North India. Accordingly, she had her mother and some of her brothers brought to Calcutta, and with them all, as well as Swami Yogananda, Golap-Ma, and Yogin-Ma, she left for Banaras and Vrindaban. At the latter place, they stayed for about two months (middle of February to middle of April); and then they came back to Calcutta, from where her relatives left for Jayrambati. But she spent a month at the Colootola house of Master Mahashaya, after which she went to Jayrambati by way of Kamarpukur (13th May, 1895).¹

1. On page 319 of *Shri Shri Mayer Katha*, part I, we read, 'Returning from there (Vrindavan), the Mother lived at the Colootola house of Master

From Vrindavan, the Mother had brought a small image of Gopala (Baby Krishna), which lay at her Jayrambati house without any worship. One day, as the Mother lay on her cot, she saw Gopala crawling to the cot and saying, 'You brought me here, but have shelved me away—you don't give me any food, you don't worship. If you don't worship me, none will.' The Mother got up at once, brought out Gopala from where he was and kissed him by touching his chin with her hand, and after offering him some flowers placed him near the Master's picture. From that day Gopala never again missed his daily worship along with the Master's. We have noted that during her stay in the village, the Mother spent some time at Kamarpukur also. Thus in November, 1895, she was there with Golap-Ma who suffered then from malaria.

We next meet the Holy Mother in Calcutta during the marriage of Sri Ramakrishna Bose, son of Balaram Babu, which took place in the second week of May (27th Vaishakh), 1896. As Balaram Babu's house was rather crowded with guests, she was accommodated in the house of Sri Sharat Sarkar, a young devotee of the Master. When the Mother was there, one day, a letter from Swami Vivekananda, urging all to take up the service of Narayana in all beings, was read to her; and she remarked, 'Naren (Vivekananda) is an instrument of Thakur (the Master) who makes him write these words for inspiring his children and devotees for doing his work, for doing good to all in the world. What Naren writes is true and must be fulfilled hereafter.' Referring to this stay of the Mother in the house of Sharat Sarkar, his friends and others would say, 'Sharat, you have performed Durga worship for about a month, while people do it for three days only. Whereas they worship a clay image, you have worshipped a living image of the Divine Mother'.

Mahashaya for about a month.' In his unpublished memoirs, too, Master Mahashaya mentions that the Mother left for Jayrambati from his house at 52 Bhavani Datta Lane (Colootola).

After a month had been spent here she was accommodated in a rented house near the Ganges on the Sarkar Bari Lane, in Baghbazar (Calcutta). On the ground floor of the house was stocked turmeric, whence it was called the godown (Gudam-badi); the first and second floors were habitable. The topmost floor was allotted to the Mother and other women devotees. The Mother had a wide view of the Ganges from there. On the lower floor lived Swamis Brahmananda, and Yogananda, and a few other monks who attended to the Mother's needs. The Mother lived here for some five or six months, and then left for the village after the worship of Kali in November. During her next visit, which came off in the second quarter of 1898, she lived at 10/2 Bosepara Lane, Baghbazar.

HER BURDEN-BEARERS

The period of the Mother's stay at 10/2 Bosepara Lane is important in more than one sense. From the second quarter of the year she had been living there. And Swami Yogananda was also there as her attendant. Swami Trigunatitananda went there whenever he could spare time from his duties in connection with the Bengali periodical *Udbodhan*. Some others, also, lived in the house now and then.

In the previous year Swami Vivekananda had returned from America to Calcutta (27th February, 1897). And after a contract had been entered into on the 3rd February, 1898, for the purchase of a plot of land on the Ganges at Belur for the permanent location of the Ramakrishna Math, the monastery had been shifted temporarily from Alambazar to Nilambar Babu's garden for carrying on the building work on the new land. When the actual construction began in April under the able supervision of Swami Vijnanananda, the Holy Mother was one day brought in a boat to the monastery. She was accompanied by Swami Yogananda, Brahmachari Krishnalal (Swami Dhirananda), and Golap-Ma. As soon as the boat touched the landing stairs, a conch was blown to announce the auspicious event; and when the Mother alighted, the monks washed her feet and with extreme veneration led her to the verandah of the shrine, where she sat, while the monks fanned her to give her relief from the heat of the day. After all had bowed down to her, she entered the shrine to worship the Master; this over, she offered him food and laid him to rest. She herself took some rest after lunch and at four in the afternoon started for the boat with her companions. Just then Brahmachari Krishnalal carried the earnest request of Swami Brahmananda, 'May the Mother condescend to tread on the new land of the Math before she departs.' Accordingly, the Mother went

to the land by the boat, while Swami Yogananda walked to it. Sister Nivedita, Mrs. Ole Bull, and Miss MacLeod, who were then staying in a house there, came out to greet the Mother and show her round. How delighted was the Mother to see her dream of having a permanent monastery on its way to fulfilment! After she had seen all, she said with joy, 'At long last the boys have a place to lay their heads in — the Master has cast his benign look (on them) after such a long time!' At the end, she got into the boat and started for Calcutta.

Swami Vivekananda came back to the Math in October, 1898, after his visit to Amarnath and Kshirbhavani in Kashmir. He was in bad health then. On the second day of the Durga worship he, along with Swamis Brahmananda, Prakashananda and Vimalananda, went to Baghbazar to make his obeisance at the feet of the Mother. There he fell prostrate before her. The Mother stood at a corner, covering her entire body with a wrapper. Her talks with the Swami were in a very low tone, so that they had to be repeated more distinctly by Brahmachari Krishnalal. When the Swami prostrated himself, the Mother blessed him by touching his head with her right hand. Then this loving and world-famous son of the Mother complained with an air of petulance, 'Such indeed is your Master, Mother! Just because a Fakir's disciple in Kashmir used to visit me, the Fakir cursed me saying, "He shall have to leave this place in three days with stomach trouble." And sure enough, it happened just as he had said — I had to flee away helter-skelter! Your Master could do nothing whatsoever.' The Mother had her answer communicated, 'It's an occult science. One can't but bow down before it, my boy! They didn't, in fact, come to destroy. Our Master heeded even such things as the cry of a lizard or a sneeze.¹ And we hear that Sankar-

1. At these sounds one must stop doing anything, as they augur evil.

acharya too, allowed his body to be afflicted with a disease.¹ It is known to you that as the result of a curse from his cousin Haladhari, the Master had haemorrhage from his mouth. Your suffering from disease is the same as the Master suffering from it.' The Swami, still in a mood of irascibility, protested that he was not ready to accept all this despite the Mother's argument, and in fact the Master was nothing. Then the Mother answered with some amusement, 'Is there any other way out, my son? For, sure enough, you are tied to his hem-string.' The Swami knew the truth of this too well, and so he silently bowed down and took leave with tearful eyes.

Sister Nivedita, after returning from Kashmir, took up her residence with the Mother who was very kind to her and treated her like a daughter. But she soon realized that the stay of a foreigner in a brahmin family could complicate matters for the Mother's relations who had to move amidst orthodox people; and hence, though the Mother said nothing, she, of her own accord, shifted to another house on the same lane.

Soon came the day (12th November, 1898) of the annual Kali worship, and the monks at the Belur Math made preparations for the purpose. The Mother went there in the morning with the picture of the Master which she worshipped daily. After alighting from the boat at the monastery at Nilambar Babu's garden house, she proceeded on foot to the newly bought land and after cleaning a spot with her own hands, worshipped the Master there. At noon she returned to the monastery where she took some *prasada*. In the afternoon, Sister Nivedita took her along with Swamis Vivekananda, Brahmananda, and Saradananda to 16 Bosepara Lane, where the Sister's Girls' School was formally declared open by the Mother.

1. At Kamakhya a Tantrika was defeated in argument by Sankara; and in order to avenge this defeat the Tantrika laid a curse on him that he should get fistula, and he did get it.

Either during this or some other visit of the Mother to the Math land, Swami Vivekananda went round with her and said, 'This is your own place, Mother; and here you move about at ease.' The Mother said afterwards about this land, 'Of a truth, I always saw as though the Master lived on the land on the other side of the Ganges — in a cottage just where the present monastery and plantain trees are.' This vision referred to a time when the land had not been purchased.

On the completion of the new buildings, Swami Vivekananda, on the 9th December, 1898, carried on his own shoulders the vessel containing the Master's ashes, placed it on a big altar on the newly bought land and performed worship and *homa* duly. Some monks began to reside there from that very day, while the whole monastery shifted to the new buildings on the 2nd January of the following year. The Mother had prayed for a lasting habitation for her sons; and here it was.

This happiness, was however, unfortunately marred by a very sad event in a few months. Even while the Sister Nivedita School and the Belur Math were becoming accomplished facts and the devotees of the Master had reason to be proud, Swami Yogananda lay seriously ill at the Mother's rented house in Calcutta. Two physicians of repute, Dr. Bepinbehari Ghosh and Dr. Shashibhushan Ghosh, both devotees of the Master, were in attendance, and both were unanimous that the intestines were dangerously out of order. As the allopathic treatment produced no result, Kavirajas were called in to try the indigenous system. The monks from the Belur Math were constantly in attendance. In fact, every possible step was taken for his recovery; but the patient's condition deteriorated. The Mother was so very anxious for him that any apparent alleviation of the sufferings of Yogananda produced a corresponding elation in her, and she too felt healthier; but as he lost more and more weight she too, became correspondingly emaciated. For the proper nursing of the

patient the Mother suggested at this time that his wife should be brought there; but Swami Yogananda objected vehemently. The Mother still brought her to him and said, 'Give her some instruction.' The monk Yogananda, however, who was free from all worldly shackles and whose vision was more than ever bent towards Infinity, said with extreme unconcern, 'As to that, you know best.' As the last day approached, one of the Mother's attendants went upstairs to give her flowers for worship, when he saw her sitting with her face to the west and legs outstretched, while tears rolled down her cheeks. He tried to console her as best as he could but the Mother asked in desperation, 'My boy, what will happen to my son Yogen?' The attendant tried to impress on her that there was really no cause for anxiety, for Swami Yogananda would recover. Still she said, 'But, my boy, I have seen it...At dawn I saw that the Master had come to take him.' And she burst into tears. Then regaining a little composure she added, 'Don't you tell anybody. Such things are not to be talked about.'

At noon of the 28th March, the condition of the patient became worse and at three in the afternoon his face shone with a celestial light. Brahmachari Krishnalal, who sat at his head, now began weeping; and the Mother, who was upstairs and whose ears were alert, caught the sound; and she too burst forth into a wail. An attendant, surprised at this piteous wailing of the Mother, who was otherwise so calm and collected, ran immediately upstairs to compose her with entreaties by taking hold of her feet; but she brushed him aside saying, 'Off with you! My Yogen has left me — who will now look after me?' Everything was over soon. The Mother next day heaved a long sigh and said, 'A brick has slipped off the structure; now the whole thing will come down.'

From the subsequent talks and action of the Mother we can have an idea of the depth of her affection for this son of hers, and the extent of her dependence on him. In her reminiscent moods she said at different times, 'Nobody

loves me as Yogen did. If anybody gave him so much as eight annas, he kept it by saying, "Mother will go out on pilgrimages, etc., and then she will need it." He was always by my side. Because he lived in the midst of women, the boys taunted him. Yogen told me, "Mother you will call me 'Yoga'." Yogen passed away saying, "Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva, and the Master came to take me, Mother."...The Master used to speak of him as Arjuna... Sarat (Swami Saradananda) and Yogen — these two belong to my inner circle.'

It should be mentioned here that the Mother referred to Swamis Yogananda and Saradananda as her 'burden-bearers'. She said, 'I don't see any one who can now carry my burden (i.e., shoulder my responsibilities). Yogen was there. And there is Krishnalal too, — calm and quiet — a disciple of Yogen.' On another occasion she said, 'Boy-Yogen served me very well indeed, none else can do the like of it. Only Sarat is able to render such service. Sarat has been doing so after boy-Yogen. My child, it is extremely difficult to shoulder my responsibilities. None other than Sarat will be able to carry my burden.' Instances of Swami Saradananda's incomparable service will be plentiful as we proceed. But now we are dealing with Swami Yogananda's.

We have referred to the worship of Jagad-dhatri at the Mother's paternal home. Her family was poor and there were not enough members to assist in the preparations for the worship. Consequently, the Mother had to go to Jayrambati at that time for scouring the metal vessels and such other tasks. To remove this difficulty Swami Yogananda purchased wooden vessels with some money he had collected and said to her, 'Mother, you won't have to go for scouring the vessels.'

Every memory of Yogananda was dear to the Mother. The Swami had got a quilt made for her. Finding it worn out after long use, she handed it over one day to her disciple Bibhutibhushan Ghosh to have it renewed, by

carding the cotton and changing the cover. But soon the thought occurred to her that if the quilt was thus renewed then the memory of her beloved son might be hurt. That was too sad to contemplate and so she corrected herself and said, 'No, Bibhuti, you need not take the quilt. Yogen gave it to me — the very sight of it reminds me of him.'

Once on coming to the Belur Math during the Durga worship, the Mother saw an oil-painting of Swami Yogananda hung on the wall outside the Master's shrine. She gazed at it intently for a considerable time and then entered the shrine to bow down before the Master as usual; but from there she came out so quickly that to the people present there it seemed as though her mind was engaged in so intense a search after her son in some unseen domain that it refused to be fixed to this world.

The Mother regarded Swami Yogananda as belonging to that galaxy of divine souls who are known as Ishwara-kotis, or as Sri Krishna's companion Arjuna, who came down again with Sri Ramakrishna to establish the Kingdom of Heaven on earth. He served the Mother for more than twelve long years (autumn of 1886 to spring of 1899) with unswerving devotion.

Swami Yogananda's successor was selected long before he left his field. Swami Saradananda once said to him, 'Yogin, I can't really follow all that Naren (Swami Vivekananda) says. In what a diversity of moods he talks! Whatever standpoint he takes up, he makes so much of it that the others pale into insignificance.' Yogananda said, 'I tell you one thing, Sarat, you cling to the Mother; whatever she says will be right.' Not stopping there, he took him to the Mother. And in this way Saradananda gradually got the privilege of serving the Mother which he did in the ideal way and became immortal in the annals of the Ramakrishna movement. But he did not step into Swami Yogananda's shoes immediately after the latter's passing away. He was then in Western India, collecting

money under the instructions of Swami Vivekananda. On his return to the Math, he became busy with multifarious duties. Hence Brahmachari Krishnalal continued as her attendant for some time, while Swami Trigunatitananda, who spent the whole day outside in connection with the fortnightly periodical *Udbodhan*, stayed in the Mother's house at night and had in his hands the general direction of her household. In fact, he was the Mother's chief attendant till at the end of 1902 he left for U. S. A. Needless to say that he discharged his duties faithfully.

A little over four months after the passing of Swami Yogananda, her youngest brother Abhay succumbed to an attack of cholera. Prasanna and Varada, two other brothers of the Mother, then lived at Chorebagan in Calcutta by turns and earned their livelihood by priesthood. Abhay, too, was then with them. He was studying medicine after passing the Entrance Examination. And just as he had finished his course at Campbell Medical School and was waiting for the result of the final examination, he was attacked by that fell disease. The Mother went to see him in a palanquin, and Swamis Saradananda and Prakashananda nursed him. But destiny was inexorable and Abhay passed away. The Mother's sorrow was so deep and abiding that in later days she used to speak of her little nephews, 'May these live long, even though they may not be educated.' When her sisters-in-law protested, 'Is that really the way you should bless any one?' she used to reply with a sad countenance, 'Yes, dear, yes! What do you know? I brought up Abhay, and he is gone!'

After Abhay's demise, the Mother could find little solace in Calcutta; and hence she left for her village by way of Burdwan. After crossing the river Damodar, she got into a cart and Swami Trigunatitananda walked in front with a staff on his shoulder like a bodyguard. When it was the third watch of the night, the Swami suddenly saw that a portion of the road had been washed away by a flood, so that if the cart passed over the

depression it might overturn or get a jolt, as a consequence of which the Mother's sleep might be disturbed or she might even be hurt. Without losing any time, he lay down on the depression and ordered the cart to be driven over his strong muscular body. Fortunately, the Mother woke up and looking ahead understood the whole situation with the help of the moonlight. She got down at once and walked over the place, reproving Trigunatitananda for his rash act.

Here is another instance of Swami Trigunatitananda's devotion to the Mother. Yogin-Ma once asked him to obtain from the market some hot chillies for the Mother. The Swami wanted to get the best, that is, hottest, ones and therefore, walked from Baghbazar to Burrabazar, a distance of about three miles, tasting the chillies at every market till he got the best at the latter place! But by then his tongue had become swollen. Even in America, he remembered her and remitted some money every month to her.

Before we close the chapter we must add for the information of the readers that though the monks looked after the needs and comforts of the Mother all along after the Master's passing away, the services of Yogin-Ma and Golap-Ma were not inconsiderable. They often lived with the Mother not only in Calcutta, but also at Jayrambati. Charmed with their devotion the Mother said subsequently, 'I can't stay in Calcutta unless Golap and Yogin are there.'

A SELF-IMPOSED LIMITATION

When the Mother sat by uncle Abhay's death-bed holding his head on her lap, caressing it softly with extreme affection, Abhay kept his eyes fixed on his sister's and said in an appealing voice, 'Sister, they are all left behind; do have an eye on them.' The Mother accepted that duty tacitly. Uncle Abhay's wife Surabala was then in the family way and was living at her father's house. She was born to misery; her mother died in her childhood and she was brought up by her mother's mother and sister. Her grandmother died soon after Abhay. On arrival at Jayrambati, the Mother remembered Abhay's request and had Surabala brought to her. A few days later, Surabala's aunt too, passed away. Unable to withstand so many bereavements in quick succession, Surabala's mind lost its balance; and while still in that state of mental aberration, she gave birth on the 26th January, 1900, to a daughter, who was named Radharani, or in short, Radhu or Radhi. The Mother's worry was great, for Surabala could not in her then state be trusted to take due care of the child. Fortunately, however, a woman named Kusumkumari came to Jayrambati next month with Swami Achalananda of Banaras. She willingly took upon herself the care of the child and stayed on at Jayrambati till the month of Jyeshtha (May-June).

It was circumstances that forced the Mother to choose Jayrambati as her chief place of residence, though it was not quite a happy choice. By divine dispensation her household worries went on multiplying all the time. We have used the phrase 'divine dispensation' with due deliberation — it is not a production of our imagination. With a view to making his incarnation a success, the Master had been forging around the Mother various fetters of love, the strongest of which was Radhu. After the Master's passing away, the Mother's mind found

no solace anywhere. It kept on groping in a dark vacuum as it were, and she prayed, 'Why should I live any longer?' Just then she had the vision of a girl of ten or twelve years of age, with a red cloth on her body, frolicking about in front of her. The Master pointed to the girl and said, 'Let this be your main-stay. What a number of boys will now come to you!' With this he disappeared, and the girl too was nowhere to be seen. Long after that, the Mother was one day sitting in her brother's house at Jayrambati. Surabala was then unmistakably insane. She went in front holding under her arms some patched clothes which brushed the ground behind, and she was followed by her daughter Radhu at a distance, crawling and crying. The sight sent a dart of horror through the Mother's mind, who thought, 'Of a truth, who else will look after this child if I don't? She has no father, and her mother is mad.' She ran and lifted the child into her arms, and the Master immediately appeared to her to say, 'This is that girl; hold on to her; this is *yoga-maya*.'

This fact is borne out by the Mother's own references to it at different times. Her fondness for Radhu gave rise to doubts in critical observers who often blurted out trenchant remarks. One devotee, for instance, asked, 'Mother, why are you so fond of her? You are uttering "Radhi, Radhi" day and night like any worldling. And yet you pay no attention to the many devotees that come to you. Such attachment! Is this good?' Such a question was nothing new to the Mother. She would answer modestly, 'We are women, we are like that.' But today she warmed up a little and said, 'Where can you get a parallel to this? Would you find out a second one like me? The fact is, the mind of those who meditate on the Supreme Reality becomes very sharp and pure, and whatever it takes hold of, it clasps with some might. This appears as attachment. When the lighting flashes, it is reflected on the sashes and not on the blinds.' On

another occasion she said, 'See! They say that I am lost in thoughts of Radhu, that I am greatly attached to her. If that bit of attachment were not there, then this body would not have survived the passing away of the Master. Is it not for his work that he has preserved this body by involving me in the thoughts of Radhu? When my mind is detached from her, this body will perish too.' And she said, 'This constant thought of Radhi that I have, is only a delusion which I have accepted for making living possible for me.' The meaning of such avowals is so palpably clear, that we need not mar their beauty by additional remarks.

Other reasons also might have contributed to the kind of background that was created for the unfoldment of the Mother's life. As some devotees who aspired after material welfare were scared away by the Master's cancer, thinking that it was useless to run after a man who had not himself transcended bodily shortcomings, so also God might have created round the Holy Mother an encrustation of apparent worldliness in order to keep away people who appreciate only exuberance of spirit but are blind to silent and hidden virtues. Furthermore, though the Master set an incomparable ideal for both monks and householders, yet the most valuable part of his life was spent outside family surroundings; and hence we lack here an abundance of examples of how a person, living in the midst of hundreds of daily worries, can yet rise higher through sheer force of will, character, and faith in God. The life of the Mother is woven with the warp and woof of various complicated domestic problems; and the events there are full of tears, troubles, and vexations, even from the worldly point of view. And yet she is not only always entirely above their degrading influence but her every movement is resplendent with a divine grace. This interfusion of divine and human elements makes the Mother's life instructive and its appeal irresistible to men who tread the wonted paths of the work-a-day world, and inspiring and illuminat-

ing to others who are in search of a higher ideal. And in particular, her life is of special significance to women who spend their lives with their families in a more real sense than men do. We shall come across these facts over and over again. For the present we are having a passing look at them.

To have an inkling of the many obstacles through which the Mother's love had to manifest itself, let us look at the conduct of her brothers. During the Mother's stay elsewhere, her brothers, the 'uncles', pestered her for monetary help or troubled her about family dissensions. When reading their letters out to her, somebody might remark, 'Give them plenty of money, Mother. Pray to the Master. Let them enjoy to their hearts' content, so that their hankering may cease.' To this she would reply, 'Can their craving ever cease? Nothing will stop them — not even if they are given all and more than they ask for. Will worldly people ever be satisfied? There are only tales of woe at their place. It's that Kele (Kali) who always cries for money. And following him, Prasanna too is now doing so. Varada never wants; he says, "Where can sister get money?" On another day she said about her exacting brothers with a shrug, 'They are crying themselves hoarse for money only, my son! — "Give us money, give us money." They never ask for knowledge and devotion even by accident. So let them have what they want.' Needless to say that through the Mother's grace they were having what they wanted.

From the above account the reader must not conclude that there was no finer element in the mental make-up of the uncles, or that they had no nobler aspiration. The great poet and dramatist Girishchandra Ghosh once commented that the uncles in their previous births had practised terrible penances even to the point of sacrificing their own heads; and that was why they got the Mother of the Universe as their sister. And from different events we can conclude that they were to some extent

conscious of her divinity, though it was so overlaid with worldly sentiments that it exerted no perceptible influence over their lives. In illustration of this, let us cite some examples, though they belong to a later period.

When the Mother was returning to Jayrambati after the worship of Durga in Girish Babu's house in 1907, she sent direction to her brothers to post some people with light and other equipment to receive them across the Amodar. But when she went there with her companions, there was no one to receive her. As a result, they had to ford the river somehow and reach Jayrambati in the dark. At dinner time a devotee remarked, 'Mother, have you noticed their lack of any sense of propriety? You were coming, but they did not send a single man to the riverside.' At this the Mother asked uncle Prasanna, 'I came here alone; why did you not send any one to the riverside? These sons of mine came; but you didn't send any man, nor did you yourself come.' 'Sister,' replied uncle Prasanna, 'I didn't send anybody for fear of Kali, lest he should say, "He is going there to ingratiate himself into sister's favour."' Do I not understand how high you are and what rare souls these devotees are? I know everything; but I am helpless. The Lord has not granted me that power this time. Kindly bless me that I may get you as my sister in every life just as I have you in this; I don't want anything else.' 'Again in your house?' the Mother cut him short with a shrug. 'It's enough you had it so this time. Rama said, "May I never again be born in Kausalya's womb after my death."' Among you again!'

Another day, uncle Prasanna argued with the Holy Mother, 'Sister' I heard it said that you appeared to some one in dream, gave him a *mantra*, and assured him also of his salvation. And you brought us up on your lap — should we be for ever what we are?' The Mother said in reply, 'It shall be as the Master will ordain. And mind you, how often Sri Krishna played with the cow-boys, frolicked with

them, and shared the same food with them; yet did they know who Krishna was?'

Not that the Mother was always so indifferent; she was ready to help these dear brothers of her and put hopes in their hearts for this world as also the next. Uncle Prasanna asked her once, 'Sister, we were born of the same womb; what shall be our lot?' The Mother said encouragingly, 'That's true to be sure; what fear need you have?'

In addition to these able but inconsiderate brothers there were the foolish but helpless nieces. We shall see, as we proceed, that the Mother had to shoulder the burden of some of these. And to crown all, there was Surabala, better known among the devotees as the mad aunt. Her aberrations sometimes reached such a pitch, that the Mother was heard to say, 'Maybe, I offered the *bel* leaves along with their thorns on Siva's head; and hence there is this thorn by my side.'

So long as the Mother lived at Jayrambati, she had to undergo strenuous physical labour. Times there were when she boiled bushels of paddy all the livelong day; and on succeeding days she was constantly at the husking machine making rice. And along with these were cooking, drawing water, scouring utensils and such other routine works. She was as diligent as her mother, by whose side she was always to be found. At one time the Mother had to work in the family so hard that her legs got swollen and she remarked, pointing this to others, 'Girish Babu was true when he said that these relatives had performed the severest of penances.'

Let us now turn back to the time of the Mother's stay at Jayrambati in 1900. As it was usual with her in those days to spend some time at Kamarpukur, during her stay in her village home, she went there this time as well but fell ill. We have it on the authority of the maidservant Sagarer Ma, of whom we wrote earlier, that the Mother had an attack of diarrhoea accompanied by vomiting,¹ and

1. This is how Sagarer Ma puts it in her simple way. In reality it was a

that the maid nursed her during the illness. Noticing the woman cleansing everything with her hands the Mother asked, 'Well, my dear, I don't think you feel any repulsion!' Sagarer Ma replied, 'Why should I be cleansing with the hand if I should feel so?' Information was sent to Jayrambati and Belur Math at the commencement of the attack. When the Mother came round a little, uncle Kali took her in a bullock-cart to Jayrambati. Two monks came from Belur Math after some three or four days, but the Mother declined to go to Calcutta. Pleased with the services of Sagarer Ma, the Holy Mother blessed her saying, 'You will never be in want of food or cloth.' And Sagarer Ma assured someone after recounting the incident, 'To tell you the truth, sir, I have never been in difficulty about food and cloth. The Master manages it for me.'

During the time of which we are writing, the Mother spent a year and a quarter at Jayrambati, and then came to Calcutta in October, 1900, with her uncle Nilmadhav, the mad aunt, Radhu, and Bhan-pisi, a woman acquaintance of the village of whom we have spoken earlier. In Calcutta, she lived for a year at 16-A Bosepara Lane, the Nivedita School having shifted from there to 17 Bosepara Lane.

Next year, Swami Vivekananda celebrated the annual worship of Durga at the Belur Math; and as he felt it imperative to have the Mother's presence at the worship, she was prevailed upon to come to Belur with some women devotees and stay at the garden house of Nilambar Babu for five days (18th to 22nd October, 1901). The worship was performed in the name of the Holy Mother; for Swami Vivekananda declared, 'We are all penniless beggars; the worship can't be in our names.' The Mother's attendant Brahmachari Krishnalal officiated as the priest under the

case of cholera as we learn from the Belur Math Diary, which further records that Swami Trigunatitananda went to Jayrambati and that another monk went there in October to bring her back to Calcutta. She was present at the Belur Math on the 24th January, 1901, at the birthday anniversary of the Master.

direction of (*tantradharaka*) Ishwarchandra Chakravarty, father of Swami Ramakrishnananda. Through the Holy Mother, Swami Vivekananda offered twenty-five rupees to the *tantradharaka* for his priestly offices.

One night a thief made his way into the kitchen of the Mother's rented house in Calcutta by breaking the window on the narrow lane on which it looked. The mad aunt was in the habit of leaving her bed even while it was dark. As she approached the kitchen with a lamp in hand, she screamed and fainted at the sight of the man. Her consciousness returned through the effort of other inmates, but her brain became all the more deranged, so much so, that the Mother decided to leave with her for the village. Kusumkumari had taken charge of Radhu on the latter's arrival at Calcutta. Yogin-Ma and others, therefore, argued that such a woman should be engaged for looking after the child even at Jayrambati, and the devotees would defray the expenses; the Mother could thus stay on after sending home Surabala with her daughter. The Mother heard all that, but said nothing then. But when she sat for *japa* in the evening, an agonizing scene floated before her mind's eye which made her restless and made her reverse Yogin-Ma's plan. She saw that the girl was being subjected to such untold suffering owing to the craziness of her mother, that there was grave risk to her life at any moment. The Mother was so overpowered at the thought that she left her seat hurriedly and, communicating everything to Yogin-Ma, said definitely that it would not be possible for her to live in Calcutta separated from Radhu; for the good of the girl the Mother must be by her side at Jayrambati.

The Mother left for the village home with Surabala, Radhu, and Nilmadhav; but Bhanu-pisi stayed back for continuing her holy bath in the Ganges for some time more. The history of the next two years is a complete blank. But as we know that in those days the Mother usually went to Jayrambati before the Jagad-dhatri worship

(November) and came back to Calcutta at the end of winter, we may guess that she might have done so during these two years also.

In the month of Magha (January-February), 1904, when the Mother came to Calcutta, she took up her residence at 2/1 Baghbazar Street, which Swami Saradananda had engaged for her. She lived here for about a year and a half. For bringing her to Calcutta this time Swamis Saradananda and Virajananda, and Yogin-Ma went to Jayrambati by way of Burdwan and the Mother came along with Nilmadhav, Bhanu-pisi, and others by the same route. In Calcutta, Swami Saradananda lived in the same rented house with the Mother for taking care of her. From this time onward, Mrs. Ole Bull began to help her with regular remittances.

In the meantime the number of Mother's dependants had increased. Her uncle Nilmadhav, who had been a cook at the Paikpara Raj house, retired in old age on a small pension. But he was unmarried and had nobody to look after him. Hence he spent his last few years under the Mother's care. This was his second visit to Calcutta with her. The Mother took a personal interest in his comforts. If the devotees brought for her some good things—some untimely fruits—from the market she was sure to select the best among them for Nilmadhav. If any one protested, she explained, 'Dear son, how long, after all, will uncle live? It is best to have his desires fulfilled now. As for us, we shall live pretty long to have many things to eat.' In words and deeds this natural love flowed not only towards Nilmadhav, but also towards everyone who came into contact with her, of which we shall get plenty of illustrations in future.

During this stay at the Baghbazar house, the Mother continued to be in close relation with the Nivedita School; and the workers of the School, too, tried to serve her in all possible ways. Their carriage was at her disposal for going to the Ganges for bathing, for visiting the zoological garden,

the museum, the botanical garden, Kalighat, and other places of interest. She took these opportunities to walk a little to see if her legs could have some relief from the rheumatism which she had developed at Dakshineswar and which became her constant companion, so that she had to limp about.

During the Janmashtami (Krishna's birthday in August) celebration¹ the Mother went on invitation to Kankurgachhi along with her nieces Lakshmi, Nalini, and Radhu, as also Golap-Ma. The Mother was highly pleased with the celebration; but it strained her endurance to the utmost when at the request of Swami Yogavinode, the head of the monastery, she had to sit silently with her body covered all over with a cotton sheet according to her habit to accept the salutations of the devotees, which continued till six o'clock in the evening. She spoke of her discomfort to Golap-Ma only after returning home.

While still at this house she went one night to see the performance of *Vilvamangala* at the request of Girish Babu who himself played the role of the false spiritual aspirant. When that hypocrite told the woman Thakamani, that he would most assuredly teach her the love of Krishna, the Mother remarked with a derisive smile, 'It may as well not be done at this age.' And at the sight of the all-absorbing love of *Vilvamangala* she said, 'Aha! Aha!'

At this time Gopaler Ma, the very old woman devotee of the Master, lived in a room at the Nivedita School premises. The Mother revered her like a mother-in-law and sent food for her from her own kitchen. In the closing days, the old lady was very little conscious of anything except her rosary, for which she became restless if it was not at hand. She could not recognize anybody; but when the Mother came she said in a faint voice, 'Who's that? Is it you, daughter-in-law? Come.'

1. There is an annual celebration at the place in commemoration of the interment of the holy ashes of the Master there on that day.

The Mother could not go to Jayrambati during the Jagad-dhatri worship (November) of 1904, because her household had become so big that moving about with all was an expensive affair. Moreover, she was improving in health and the devotees could not entertain the idea of her going to a malarious village just then. Nonetheless, the worship was so dear to her that she saw to the timely despatch of all the necessary things with her brother Varada and a devotee; and she got over her anxiety only after they returned to assure her that everything had been done properly. Then at the end of November the proposal for her going to Puri took shape.

The Bengal Nagpur Railway had by this time been completed. The Mother travelled in a reserved second-class compartment with Nilmadhv, the mad aunt, Golap-Ma, Sister Lakshmi, Radhu, Master Mahashaya's wife, Chunilal Babu's wife, and Kusumkumari. Swami Premananda and two devotees got into an inter class compartment. The train reached Puri in the morning, and the Mother with her relatives and women companions took residence in Kshetrabasir Math of the Boses, while Swami Premananda and others went to their second house near the sea called Shashi-niketana. The Mother's first duty at Puri was to go to the Jagannatha temple to have a look at the Lord. On subsequent days it was her daily task to visit the temple with others early morning and evening. One day there was arranged at her residence a *Katha* by a temple priest, which consisted in relating the story and glory of Jagannatha from the ancient books. On this occasion about fifty temple priests were sumptuously fed. The Holy Mother and others used to obtain on payment the consecrated food from the temple for their daily meals; the feast for the priests also was arranged similarly.

At Puri the Mother had a boil on her foot which gave her intense pain, and yet she did not allow it to be operated on. One day at the temple, somebody's foot touched

the boil, thereby causing excruciating pain to her. When Swami Premananda heard of this, he came the next day with a young doctor ostensibly to pay their obeisance to the Mother. She, as was her habit on such occasions, sat covering herself completely with a cotton sheet. The doctor now brought out his knife and, in the act of saluting by touching the feet, opened the boil and then begged her pardon saying, 'Mother, please don't be offended.' This unexpected move irritated the Mother a little at first. But when through proper dressing the pain subsided and the wound healed up in a trice, she heartily blessed her sons despite their dare-devilry.

A few days after this, the Mother wanted to bring her mother and a brother to Puri to give them an opportunity to see the Lord. A devotee was accordingly sent to Jayarambati. This had to be done without the mad aunt's knowledge, for she was too envious to brook anybody's sharing the Mother's affection or money which were to be monopolized by or kept in reserve for herself and her daughter. The devotee went via Vishnupur by train, the railway line on that side having been constructed a little earlier, and communicated the Mother's invitation to grandmother and uncle Kali who alone were expected to come. But at the news of the pilgrimage the number swelled till a big party¹ consisting of the grandmother, uncle Kali with his father-in-law, wife, and two sons, and a villager named Sitaram started by way of Garbeta. No sooner did they step into the Kshetrabasir Math than Surabala got into a frenzy, and went on castigating the Mother with all kinds of gestures and postures and doggerel verses.

It is an immemorial tradition at Puri that no caste distinction is observed so far as the *prasada* of Jagannatha is concerned, so much so, that *prasada* put into one's mouth by even a man of the lowest caste, at the Anandabazar

1. According to one authority all the sisters-in-law of the Mother went with the party.

within the temple precincts, may not be refused. The Mother showed her respect for this hoary custom by putting the *prasada* into the mouths of the devotees and asking them to put it into hers. While this merry ceremony was going on, Master Mahashaya and uncle Varada came there by chance from Calcutta, and they too joined in it.

All those who came from Jayrambati except the grandmother, left again in December. The Mother continued there for some time more. Her foot was now cured of the boil, the rheumatism too, was not acute, and the body was healthy. Therefore she moved about happily visiting the sacred places such as the kitchen of Jagannatha, Gundicha Bari, Lakshmi-jala, Narendra Sarovara, Govardhan Math, etc. She also circumambulated the Jagannatha temple and bathed twice in the sea. As her mind was cheerful at this time, she spoke of many anecdotes of the Master's life and of the Dakshineswar days. After spending some time thus in the salubrious, joyous, and holy atmosphere of Puri, she returned at the end of January to Calcutta where she stayed in the old rented house on the Baghbazar Street from where the grandmother left for home a little later.

BEREAVEMENTS

Nilmadhav suffered from asthma, which became unendurable sometimes. Soon after his return from Puri, the disease became so acute that it defied treatment, and he was bed-ridden. Unmindful of her own health, ease and rest, the Mother nursed him day and night, helped by some of her own attendants. But about two months after his return from Puri, his condition became very bad; and everyone was apprehensive of the worst at any moment. Once the Mother finished the worship of the Master and the offering of food to him expeditiously and came down. Then everybody pressed her to have her meal first, assuring that nothing would happen to her uncle in the meantime. The Mother hurried through her meal and then rushed to the patient. But now everyone sat silent around the patient. With great anxiety she cried out, 'Is my uncle no more?' Who could answer? The Mother's face then looked flushed with anger and repentance at the thought that she had failed to be there at the last moment just because she listened to the foolish persuasion of others. With extreme bitterness she said, 'Why did you send me to eat that dirty stuff? I missed a last look at my uncle!' And she began sobbing like a little helpless girl who had lost her father.

When she had composed herself a little, she asked an attendant to sit near the dead body while she herself went up to bring some leaves and flowers that had been offered to the Master. These she placed on the head and chest of the body and at both the places made *japa* with her hand. Then came the time for taking out the body for cremation. Of the bearers three were brahmins and another a non-brahmin. Golap-Ma noticed this unorthodox arrangement and drawing the Mother's attention said, 'Why should a sudra touch the dead body of a brahmin?' The Mother replied, 'Sudra? Devotees do not belong to any

caste.' The cremation took place duly at Kashi Mitra's Ghat; uncle Prasanna performed the last rites (April [?] 1905).

Uncle Prasanna then lived in a tiled cottage on the Simla Street. His eldest daughter Nalini had been married at a very early age, in the beginning of January, 1900, soon after the birth of Radhu. The bridegroom was Pramathanath Bhattacharya who belonged to Goghat in the Hooghly district of Bengal. With uncle Prasanna lived his wife, two daughters—Nalini and Maku—and Pramatha. Pramatha fell ill at this time and the disease was diagnosed as double pneumonia. The Mother kept herself informed about Pramatha's condition and often visited him.

The doctor in attendance was still a young man; but owing to some family misunderstanding he had become very morose and had lost all interest in life. To relieve his mind of extreme depression, he took morphia, frequently injecting it into his body at regular intervals. One day an attendant of the Mother, who was also a friend of the doctor, took him to the Mother who had that day gone on an invitation to Master Mahashaya's house at Jhamapukur along with some devotees. When the doctor and his friend arrived, she was in the shrine, where the two were directed to proceed. The doctor had come out only with a loin-cloth on a sudden call from his friend, thinking that something was wrong with Pramatha which required his immediate presence. He had also finished his lunch. Therefore when the friend proposed on the way that he should have his initiation from the Mother, he was rather surprised and pleaded his handicap. But the friend argued that it would be better to leave the whole matter in the hands of the Mother who best knew what formalities were essential before initiation. So the doctor entered the shrine and explained everything to the Mother. Still the Mother initiated him with a *mantra*. That produced a tremendous change in him. His whole face became radiant, the black tinge at the corners of his eyes disappeared, and his mind

was filled with a new light. That day he sat again at lunch with all the devotees, and forgetting caste prejudices and thinking himself to be as good a son of the Mother as any other, shared the same food with his friend, who belonged to a lower caste. Noticing this, the Mother remarked that they looked like two sons of the same mother, to which they added, 'That's true enough, Mother; for we are your sons.' The mental condition of the doctor improved so much in course of time that he got over his misunderstanding and mental suffering, set an example to other devotees by whole-heartedly serving the Mother and the monks of the Ramakrishna Math and helping in the work of the Ramakrishna Mission.

Some photographs of the Mother were taken during her residence at the Baghbazar house. Some of these were taken at the studio of Shri B. Datta of Chitpore Road, in the beginning of April, 1905. In one of these the Mother sits amidst Sister Lakshmi, Nalini, and Radhu. Swami Virajananda had another picture taken next month at Messrs. Van Dyke's on the Chowringhee in which the Mother sits with two plants in pots, one on either side. The picture of the Mother that is worshipped nowadays and is the most well-known was taken much earlier at the request of Mrs. Ole Bull in 1898, when the Mother lived in the Bosepara Lane house. At that time Sister Nivedita and Golap-Ma attended to the hair and clothes of the Mother according to their own taste.

Besides the doctor, another devotee named Sri Lalit-mohan Chatterji came to the Mother at this time. When he had become very intimate with the devotees and had known the Mother for some time, he became eager to be initiated by her. The Mother accordingly went to his house at Chhutarpara and gave the *mantra* to him and his wife. Lalit Babu also became a very sincere friend of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission and made his own life a real success by serving the Mother in various ways.

Binodbehari Som, a student of the school where Master Mahashaya taught, was introduced by him to the Master who influenced him very much. But subsequently Som entered a theatre and took to drinking under the influence of which he talked desultorily when returning home at dead of night. He knew Swami Saradananda intimately and used to call him his *dost* (chum). His friends nick-named him Padmabinode. Now, Padmabinode, when passing by the Mother's house on his way home, from the theatre, used to call on his *dost*, who, however, instructed everyone neither to respond nor to open the door, lest the Mother should be disturbed. One night, getting no answer from inside the house, Padmabinode started singing under the influence of liquor:

Get up, Mother gracious, and open the door;
 Nothing is visible in the dark; and my heart ever throbs.
 How often do I call on thee, O Tara (Kali) at the pitch of my voice!
 And yet, though kind thou art forsooth, how thou behavest today!

Leaving thy child outside, thou sleepest inside;
 While crying, 'Mother', 'Mother', am I reduced to skin and
 bone!

With proper pitch, tune, modulation, and cadence in all the three
 gamuts,

I call on thee so often; and still thou awakest not!
 Maybe, thou hast turned thy face because of my engrossment in play.
 Do thou look at me with upturned face, and I shan't go for play
 again.

Who but a Mother can bear the burden of such a wretched son?

The plaintive appeal of the song was irresistible. The blinds of the Mother's window went up at once, and then the window itself opened wide. Padmabinode noticed this and said with delight, 'Have you got up, Mother? Have you heard your son's call? Since you've got up, take this

salute.' So saying he began to roll on the street. Then taking the dust from the street and putting it on his head he went away singing another tune,

Keep Mother Shyama (Kali) carefully concealed in your heart;
O mind, mayst thou and I only see Her, and none else.

and he repeated with some gusto,

May I see Her, and *not* my *dost*.

Next day the Mother inquired about him, and learning everything, remarked, 'See, how firm is his conviction!' Padmabinode saw the Mother in that very manner at least once again. Next morning, when her attendants remonstrated that it was not proper for her to leave her bed at that unearthly hour, she replied, 'I can't contain myself at his call.'

Not long after, Padmabinode had a severe attack of dropsy, and he had to enter a hospital. During his last moments he expressed a desire to hear the Bengali *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, which was read out to him. Tears trickled down the corners of his eyes as he heard the blessed words, and he passed away into eternal silence with the Master's name on his lips. The Mother heard all this and said with evident satisfaction, 'Why should this not be so? Was he not the Master's son? He was wallowing in mud, and has now returned to the lap to which he belonged.'

The Mother's return to Jayrambati was fixed for Jyeshtha (May-June) of 1905. This was her first journey by way of Vishnupur, where she and her party alighted from the train and had their lunch at a small wayside shop. Then Brahmachari Krishnalal who had accompanied them, started back for Calcutta, while the others got into four bullock-carts in the evening. Next morning they reached Kotulpur where they cooked and had their lunch at noon. Then the Mother and Radhu got into a palanquin which followed a shorter route to Jayrambati while the others continued in the carts by a longer one via Shihar.

The Mother had not been at Jayrambati during the Jagad-dhatri worship in the previous year; and hence the celebration this year was on a grander scale. Swami Saradananda sent there all the requisites, and the Mother added grace by her presence, and solemnity by her silent prayer.

One incident of this period shows how humble in spirit the Mother was, and yet how much esteemed she was by the local people. One day, when Sri Ganesh Ghoshal of Kamarpukur, who had been a class-mate of the Master, came to visit the Mother, she proceeded to bow down before him in all reverence; but Sri Ghoshal protested vehemently that it would be very harmful for a son to be saluted by his mother; and he himself fell down on his knees and saluted her.

At the end of 1905, Brahmachari Girija (later Swami Girijananda) went from Kankurgachhi to Jayrambati with his friend Batu Babu. He was a candidate for initiation and had obtained the Mother's permission previously. When they arrived at noon, the Mother said ruefully, 'My sons, my eldest sister-in-law¹ has got an attack of cholera. Just at noon she had cooked and fed the servants, and then suddenly fell into the grip of the disease.' Uncle Prasanna was then in Calcutta. There was neither medicine nor a doctor in the village. And so, in the course of twelve hours, the aunt died. Her daughters Nalini and Maku were still very young, and had none to look after them. The Mother who had given shelter to Radhu earlier, now took these two girls also under her care.

Brahmachari Girija now thought that under such tragic conditions, propriety demanded his keeping silent over the question of initiation; hence wishing to spend the time otherwise, he approached the Mother for her permission to go out for a visit to the Goddess Vishalakshi of Anur with whose name the childhood days of the Master

1. Rampriya Devi, first wife of uncle Prasanna.

were associated. The Mother said, 'With what expectation you must have come! Finish your bath and then come. Let me tell you something at least.' Most graciously she initiated him that very day. Batu Babu had no idea of taking any initiation just then; but the Mother blessed him also with a *mantra*.

And now came the month of Magha (January-February) of 1906, when the winter in Bengal is very cold. In the morning many sat on the terrace in front of the Mother's room. The previous day was the market day at Shiromanipur from where a woman had purchased vegetables for sale at Jayrambati. She came today, and grandmother Shyamasundari bought from her some greens and vegetables in exchange for paddy, mustard seeds, etc. Then the grandmother felt somewhat out of sorts. Nevertheless she helped in husking paddy. Soon she felt so weak that she lay down under the porch of uncle Kali's house and called out to an attendant of the Mother, 'Brother, I feel I am dying; there is a reeling sensation in the brain.' The attendant was alarmed and called the Mother there; but none could believe that the old lady was really going to breathe her last so soon. The Mother and the attendant did all they could under the circumstances. The old lady said, 'I have a desire for pumpkin curry.' The Mother assured her that she had not to worry about such a trifling thing, which would be arranged when she recovered. But grandmother said that the opportunity would never come and that for the time being she wanted a little water to drink. The Mother hurriedly brought some Ganges water and put it thrice into her mouth. Then the grandmother's body became motionless. The Mother knew that the last moment had come and so made *japa* with her hand on her head and breast. Then Shyamasundari Devi quietly passed away. It was nine o'clock in the morning. The whole household broke into a mourning wail. Uncle Varada, who was in the field, hurried back home on getting the news; and then the body was cremated on the bank of the Amodar.

The virtuous lady Shyamasundari Devi had been blessed by having had the Mother of the Universe in her womb. The Holy Mother once said, 'My father was a great devotee of Rama, and a generous soul. And how kind was my mother! That is why I was born in this house.'

In the beginning, grandmother, like others, used to think of Ramakrishna as an eccentric. But as days rolled on, this notion was replaced by an indescribable sentiment of affection mixed with awe. Grandmother loved the Master's children dearly. She stocked a good variety of rice and other eatables in anticipation of their coming; and said, 'My Sarada (Swami Trigunatitananda) may come any day, and Yogen (Swami Yogananda) may come; all these things are necessary.' She also added, 'So long as I am here, there's Brahma, there's Vishnu, there's the Universal Mother, there's Siva—all are here. When I depart, they too, will go. For who else can possibly take care of them? Mine is a household of God and godly people.' The grandmother's love embraced all the little children of the village. Even on the last day of her life, she played with her grandchildren—the little ones of the village—for a very long time.

Grandmother departed from the body fully conscious, with her blessed daughter Sarada by her side. But the Holy Mother wept bitterly like any mortal child. She was motherless now; in fact she had none else to whom she could look up for a bit of affection. Father, husband, uncle, mother,—all had left her one by one. And worse still, her Yogananda, on whom she could depend, was no more; and Abhay, whom she loved dearly, had come to an untimely end. The responsibility now thrust on her shoulders was indeed very heavy. Her sorrow today knew no bounds.

Yet the world has its own norm; and time runs its course relentlessly. Moreover, those who come to lead others possess on the one hand a most tender heart which is pained at the slightest touch of other people's misery,

and on the other hand a determination to discharge their duties manfully, without being deflected from the right course under the mightiest pressure. Hence, though the Mother could be overwhelmed with sorrow, she could not be blinded by it for ever. Moreover it devolved on her in particular to arrange for the *Shraddha* (solemn obsequies) of grandmother on the eleventh day; for her brothers depended on her in such matters. As soon as the news reached Calcutta, Swami Saradananda made elaborate arrangements for the occasion; and the ceremony was well worthy of the great soul that had presented the Holy Mother to the world. Twenty-five brass pitchers, umbrellas, seats, sandals, and other things, were given away as gifts to brahmins. And the villagers, both brahmins and non-brahmins were sumptuously fed. The last wish of the grandmother was also fulfilled by cooking sufficient pumpkin curry for all.

The intense sorrow and the strain of the obsequies told on the Mother's health heavily. As a result she became emaciated and she took one full month to recover. We do not know when she left for Calcutta after this. Most probably she did so some time in March or April, 1906, when she took residence again at 2/1 Baghbazar Street. The venerable lady Gopaler Ma was then in her death-bed at the Nivedita School premises. When the Mother went to visit her a few days before she passed away, that very affectionate lady who looked upon all as her divine child Gopala, said, 'Is it you Gopala come here?' and she stretched forth her hand to take hold of something. The Mother did not understand whom she meant and what she wanted. Then the woman devotee in attendance explained that she wanted the sacred dust of the Mother's feet, who to her was none other than the Master as identified with her Gopala. The Mother had so long been revering Gopaler Ma as though she were her mother-in-law. But at that moment none cared to stand on formalities. The Mother made no objection, and the

attendant took the dust of her feet with her apron and rubbed it all over the body of Gopaler Ma. With a heavy heart the Mother returned home. Gopaler Ma passed into eternal silence on the 24th of Ashadha (beginning of July), 1906.

The Mother returned to her native village before the Jagad-dhatri worship of 1907, which was celebrated with due solemnity in the presence of Brahmachari Krishnalal and others.

GIRISHCHANDRA GHOSH

Thus far we have followed the sequence of the unfoldment of the Mother's personality from her own point of view. We must now follow by stages the gradual comprehension of that personality from the devotees' angle of vision. Most of them did not accept her as the Universal Mother from the very beginning of their discipleship. They knew her only as the wife of their guru, and so their love, respect, and responsibility towards her were based on that relationship. As a proof of this we may say, that one day a young man went to the drawing-room of Sri Kalipada Ghosh, a staunch follower of the Master, and finding no picture of the Mother there asked for the reason. As an answer Kalipada saluted the picture of the Master with folded hands and said, 'He is, indeed, our father, and he is our mother.' Not satisfied with such an explanation, the young man spoke to Girishchandra Ghosh, the well-known actor-dramatist and devotee. The latter said, 'Did we ourselves recognize her in earlier days? It was Niranjan who opened our eyes.' The outspoken Swami Niranjanananda not only accepted the Mother as divine, but also openly preached her divinity among the devotees without any reserve. The other world-renouncing young men recognized this divinity thereafter and offered her their hearts' adoration, but even so they were not so aggressive in propagating their belief. Niranjanananda was of a different temperament; the light he had, he would not hide under a bushel. As a result of this, Girish Babu and others got a faint glimpse of her greatness.

The Master once declared that Girish's faith was more than overflowing.¹ Along with others, Girish had

1. Literally, 'five annas over and above five quarters of a rupee.' Four quarters make a rupee; five quarters make it more than enough; and five annas added to them make it more than over-sufficient.

known the Mother as his guru's wife; but from the day he knew her as divine, his reverence for her blazed into white heat. The following incident gives a little insight into his mental make-up at this time. His second wife was still alive. One evening Girish was sauntering on his roof with his wife, while on the roof of Balaram Babu's house, the Holy Mother was taking the air. Girish's wife recognized the Mother and said to her husband, 'Look there, the Mother is strolling on the roof of yonder house.' Girish turned his back to that roof saying, 'No, no, mine are sinful eyes; I shan't thus look at her stealthily;' and climbed down. The Mother came to know of this later from Girish Babu's wife.

Many believe that it was to the exceptional good fortune of this wife that Girish owed his fame, his wealth, and the grace of the Master. He had two daughters and one son through her. But when she fell ill and expired (26th December, 1888) soon after the birth of her son, Girish found himself quite forlorn. He had relinquished in favour of the Master all his ideas of personal agency even in his own activities, and so he would not even lament for his wife. That would have implied a lack of faith in Providence. And yet the pang of separation was there. To forget this he now threw himself earnestly into the study of mathematics and the upbringing of his child.

There was another reason for this. He had once entreated the Master to be born as his son. The Master had then turned down the request. And yet when this child was born after the Master had left this world, Girish was firmly convinced that the Master had really answered his earnest prayer and blessed him by being born in his house. He, therefore, took the utmost care of the boy whose appearance and deportment so fascinated and attracted visitors that they could not resist the temptation of taking him in their arms and kissing him. And whenever the Holy Mother happened to come to this house, the boy rejoiced in sitting on her lap.

When the Mother was staying at Sourindra Thakur's house at Baranagore at the end of 1890, the great dramatist went there with the boy, taken there perhaps by Swami Niranjanananda. This incident had a certain bearing on the Mother's life. For though her divinity was recognized by a limited number of lay devotees like Master Mahashaya, her glory came to be openly avowed by all the devotees only after Girishchandra had done so. Earlier than that the Mother enforced her privacy so strictly that devotees could not see her, and had to satisfy themselves by saluting her in their own minds.

Girish's son, then in his third year, had not quite learned to speak and expressed himself through gestures. That day, at Sourindra Thakur's house, the boy became anxious to see the Mother who was upstairs. He pointed towards her room and went on saying 'ooh, ooh'. At first none understood him; but at last one of the Mother's attendants guessed his meaning and carried him upstairs. The boy saluted the Mother by falling at her feet, and coming down pressed his father with his usual gestures to go up. At this Girish burst out crying, 'O my dear, how can I possibly go to see the Holy Mother; for I am veritably a great sinner.' But as the boy was insistent, Girishchandra at last took him up in his arms and walked into the Mother's room, shaking and trembling all over. Falling at her feet with tearful eyes and a voice choked with emotion, he said, 'Mother, it is because of this child that I have had now a glimpse of your blessed feet.'

The boy did not live very long; he died at the age of three. Girish went to Jayrambati some time later in 1891 in search of some consolation, and spent a few months there on the advice of Swami Niranjanananda who accompanied him as his friend and philosopher. With them went Swamis Subodhananda, Nirbhayananda, and Bodhananda, with a cook and a servant. They went by way of Burdwan, Uchalan, and Kamarpukur. At Jayrambati, Girish took his bath in a pond and went straightway to

salute the Mother in his wet clothes. He was then full of thoughts of her and his whole frame quivered with emotion. As he looked up after touching the Mother's feet with his head, he saw her face for the first time in his life and exclaimed within himself with extreme surprise, 'Hey-day! It is you to be sure, Mother!' This astonishment was derived from an earlier crisis in his life. Once, young Girish, then in the grip of cholera and apparently without hope of recovery, had a glimpse of a radiant motherly figure putting some *prasada* into his mouth saying, 'Eat'. She wore a cloth with broad red borders; her whole being was effulgent with a heavenly light and the face looked wonderfully lit up by a benign smile. The *prasada* was very tasteful. When he woke up the taste was still on his tongue. He recovered very soon; but the vivid dream remained ever fresh in his mind. Today he recognized that dream-face in the Mother's, so exactly alike were the two. And today, after such a long lapse of time, he knew that it was this divine Mother who had been protecting him all along. Yet, to make assurance doubly sure, he inquired through another, for the Mother would not speak directly to him, whether she had revealed herself to him in this way on any previous occasion. The Mother admitted of having done so. Girish's doubts were not still laid at rest. Therefore, he asked her again on another occasion, 'What kind of a mother are you?' 'I am your true mother,' replied the Mother without a moment's hesitation, 'a mother not by virtue of being your guru's wife, nor because of any assumed relationship, nor by way of empty talk, but truly the mother.'

After spending two weeks there, all except Girish-chandra, Niranjanananda, and the servants, returned to Calcutta. The great poet enjoyed immensely that long stay in the village. Freed from the bustle of the city and its unendurable constraints and never-ending worries, he lived a care-free life. He walked in the fields with the farmers, took plenty of *prasada* sitting near the Mother, and

remained ever engaged in the thoughts and talks of the Master. In the evening he sat in the open meadow enjoying the beauty of the setting sun. The villagers were quick in discovering that he was the well-known actor-dramatist Girishchandra Ghosh of Calcutta; and hence they wanted to hear from his mouth the songs composed by himself. He argued that though he was a composer, he was not a singer. Nevertheless, the villagers remained importunate, and Girish had to satisfy their curiosity. The Mother overheard him very often and learnt some of the tunes. In later days, she sang the following lines from Girishchandra for the benefit of her inquisitive sons:

(Gopala) turns back and looks, as he crawls away, lest the queen
(Yashoda, his mother) should catch hold of him.
The queen says, 'hold', 'hold' in fun, and Gopala crawls further
away.

And one day, Haridas Vairagi of Desra came and sang to the tune of his violin:

What a delightful news it is, O Uma (dear daughter)!
(Dear me!) I hear from people—say if this is true, O Siva's wife—
That you have got the name Annapurna at Banaras...
(see also p. 169.)

On hearing this song, so reminiscent of the life of the Holy Mother, neither Girish and others in the outer apartment, nor the Mother inside, could check their tears.

At Jayrambati, Girish one day entered into a vehement debate with uncle Kali as to whether the Mother was divine or not. Uncle knew her only as his sister; and this was nothing untoward for him; for the Puranas tell us that though the people of the Yadu tribe mixed freely with Krishna during play and at the time of eating, yet they could not recognize him as God. On the other hand, Girishchandra's faith was not to be shaken. 'You call my sister', argued uncle Kali, 'Mother of the Universe, Creatrix of the World, and what not! Though we were born of the same womb, I don't, forsooth,

perceive a bit of it.' 'What do you mean?' demanded Girish in a firm and deep voice, 'You are a mere village brahmin's son; you have forsaken your priestly duties of performing sacrifices, reading, and teaching, and are spending your life in farming. If one should promise you a bull, you will be dancing attendance on the man for at least six months. Is it then impossible for the Great Source of all delusion to keep you labouring under the notion that she is merely your sister, for the whole of your life? Go, and if you want freedom here and hereafter, take refuge at the Mother's feet at once. I say, go!' There was a force in what he said which impelled uncle Kali to go to the Mother and seek refuge at her feet just as Girish had suggested. But the Mother protested saying, 'O dear Kali, I am evermore the same sister. What's this you are doing now?' Uncle Kali, therefore, returned with his earlier conviction. But Girish was not so easily to be put off. He tried to send Kali to the Mother again. But uncle Kali refused to go to her.

The Mother's care and affection for Girish was unbounded. Milk was not easily available in that village, but as Girish could not do without his early morning tea, the Mother searched the village through for a little quantity of milk. Girish also noticed that his bed-sheet was always white as snow. He did not know who kept it so clean. At last he found the Mother washing it with soap at the pond. The Mother also cooked delicious dishes for him and sat by him and saw to it that he was fully satisfied.

But if she was all affection for him, she was not blind to his shortcomings. Girish had had such bitter experiences of the world that he threatened to renounce everything. But the Mother did not approve. Girish then resorted to the logical and vehement reasoning of which his keen intellect and poetic tongue were capable, and which was calculated to sweep anyone off his feet.

But the Mother successfully withstood all such argumentation, till at last Girish had to admit defeat and give up his idea.

Girish took the opportunity to spend some days at the birthplace of the Master. The Mother also went there with the party. The long association with the Holy Mother and the sacred places of Jayrambati and Kamarpukur brought the much-needed solace to Girish's lacerated heart and he returned to Calcutta to resume his literary work with fresh vigour and a clearer spiritual outlook.

Girishchandra was not only a keen observer whose poetic eyes drew in the pictures of all pure and fine things and kept them ever deposited in his heart, but also when the occasion arose, he could reproduce them vividly in words for the edification, delectation, and inspiration of others. When the Mother lived on the godown of the Sarkarbari Lane in Baghbazar (1896), Girish was a frequent visitor and came to salute the Mother. On the day that the Mother was leaving for Jayrambati (after the worship of Kali) the great poet came, and silently went up with Swami Yogananda. The others, who had gathered there, followed them. Girish prostrated himself before the Mother and said with folded hands, 'Mother, when I come to you I feel like a little child coming to its own mother. Had I been a 'grown-up' son, I would have served my mother. But it is quite different here; you serve us and we do not serve you. You are going to Jayrambati to serve the people, even by cooking food for others in the village kitchen. How can I serve you, and what do I know about serving the Mother?' His voice became choked and his whole face flushed with emotion as he spoke. At last checking himself a little and turning to the others who stood behind him, he said, 'It is difficult for human beings to believe that God can incarnate in a human form like our own. Can you realize that you are standing before the Mother of the Universe in the form of a village woman?'

Yet she is the Mother of the Universe—Maha-maya, Maha-Sakti—appearing on the earth for the salvation of all creatures and at the same time exemplifying the ideal of true motherhood.’ The words were sublime, inspiring, and calculated to electrify the atmosphere. All listened with rapt attention, and then they followed the Mother to the railway station to bid her a respectful farewell.

Girish Babu at first accepted the Mother as his guru’s wife, and then as Mother and Divinity. After close observation and acquaintance he not only came to entertain for her a deep devotion that impelled him to cry from the housetop her glory, but he also developed the strength of an innocent mind that enabled him to behave towards her like a guileless child. His solicitude for the Mother’s comfort was so great that she said, ‘He at one time defrayed all my expenses for a year and a half. How could he make a large contribution? He was never a rich man.’ Here is another instance of his loving devotion to the Mother. The Mother once returned from home, after a long time, accompanied by Golap-Ma and Yogin-Ma. The train was to have reached Howrah station from Vishnupur in the morning; and so Swami Brahmananda suggested to Swami Premananda that they might go to the station to convey their respects to her. Swami Premananda readily agreed. But at Howrah, the train was late by three hours. The two Swamis were in a fix for a little while, for the problem of transport between Belur and Howrah in those days was a difficult one. Besides, it was a summer day, and all, including the two Swamis, who had come to meet the Mother, felt uncomfortable. Still, undaunted they decided to stay on. The train steamed in long after the scheduled time and Golap-Ma and Yogin-Ma carefully helped the Mother to get down from the train. But as soon as Golap-Ma’s eyes fell on the two Swamis, she went to Swami Brahmananda and reproved him saying, ‘Well, Maharaj, have you lost your senses? The Mother has travelled through this gruelling heat; and now if even

you create a muddle by coming here to salute her, then what should I say of the others?' The innocent Swami felt guilty and dared not go a step forward. Seeing him in such a plight, the others naturally stood where they were. The Mother was taken to Baghbazar. The two Swamis now decided that though salutation was thus ruled out, it was quite in the fitness of things for them to follow the Mother to see if adequate arrangements were made for her there. So they got into a carriage and arrived at the Baghbazar house where they sat quietly in a room below. Just then Girish came to the Mother. He was scantily dressed and the half shirt that covered his body was wet with perspiration. Finding the two Swamis there, he made inquiries about the Mother. Though he was talking in a low voice, Golap-Ma heard him and hurried down and began haranguing them again as she had done at the station. But unfortunately the scene had now changed and the chief character now on the stage was no longer Swami Brahmananda but Girishchandra Ghosh. And just as Golap-Ma fired her shots at him saying, 'I am like a duck in thunder at this wonderful devotion of Girish Ghosh. I say, Girish Babu, you like to see the Mother forsooth! But the Mother has come through this gruelling heat, and when it is but reasonable for her to take a little rest, you come even here to pester her;' Girish turned a deaf ear to all this, and at once started ascending the stairs calling to the two Swamis, 'Come, come, Maharaj (Brahmananda), Baburam (Premananda), let us go to see the Mother.' And as Golap-Ma repeated her vehement protest, Girish Babu looked back and snapped at her, 'That shrew of a woman argues, indeed, that I have come to pester the Mother; whereas the Mother would feel relieved after seeing the faces of her sons after such a long absence.' They all went up. The Mother received them cordially and blessed them. In the meantime Golap-Ma too, came up and complained with tearful eyes, 'To think that Girish Babu should talk to me

thus!' The Mother turned to her and said, 'Have I not warned you off and on not to be critical of my sons?' Girish Babu went down after saluting the Mother like a victor.

The time for the Durga worship of 1907 was drawing near. Girish and his sister Dakshina requested the Mother, then at Jayrambati, to grace the occasion with her presence at their house, and give it an added charm. They offered to bear all the expenses of her journey. The Mother was then in bad health owing to malaria, but she could not resist the call of such devout souls. So arrangements were made for the journey to Calcutta. On the appointed day she started with Radhu and Radhu's mother. On reaching Vishnupur she found Master Mahashaya and Lalit Chatterji waiting there for them with all arrangements for their food and comfort. At that time, Calcutta was in the grip of a communal trouble and the town was without any light at night. So they had advanced to Vishnupur to be sure of her safe journey. The whole party boarded the train after food and reached Howrah after nightfall. Lalit Babu's carriage was ready at the station. The Mother and her relatives entered it while others sat or stood on the coach-box and the footboards and thus conducted her safely to Balaram's house where she was to stay.

Girish's sister came the next day and saluting the Mother said that by condescending to come she had solved a problem, for Girish was sulky and argued that since the worship would be a meaningless pageant in the Mother's absence, he would not have it that year unless she came.

The worship commenced after a few days, the initial ceremonies being held in the Mother's presence. At the house of Balaram Babu, again, began a second worship. From early morning of the first day of worship began pouring in a stream of devotees with flowers in their hands to be offered at the feet of the Mother, which she accepted sitting quietly for hours together. Then she was

requested to go to Girishchandra's house, where she stayed till the end of the day's worship.

On the second day of the celebration also the Mother accepted the worship of the devotees in the houses of Balaram and Girish. She was not well then; still she sat the whole time, covering herself with a cotton sheet. She disappointed none. But the strain of the two consecutive days made her so ill that it was decided that she would not be present at night at the most important worship at the moment of the juncture of the eighth and ninth days of the moon, when the demon Mahisha was killed by the Goddess. That was a sore disappointment to them all and terribly depressing for Girish. But as the blessed moment approached the Mother decided to witness the worship and with the women devotees, she walked to the backdoor of Girish's house, where she knocked and announced, 'Here I am.' The news spread with electric speed and created fresh enthusiasm. The maidservant opened the door. Girish heard with the greatest delight that the living Divine Mother was at his door to accept his worship, notwithstanding all personal inconveniences. A little while ago he had been telling his friends in the drawing-room upstairs that his going down to the place of worship was vain inasmuch as the Mother would not be there. Now at the happy news he said with a choked voice and gasping breath, 'I thought that my worship had come to nought, and just now the Mother knocks at the door and announces, "Here I am".' They all hurried down. As the Mother stood at the north-west corner fixing her eyes on the image of the Goddess, the devotees approached her and offered handfuls of flowers at her feet. The third day's worship, too, passed off merrily. All the three days the Mother accepted the flower offerings of all her children, known or unknown, not excepting even the actors and actresses of Girish's theatrical troupe.

After the celebration, the Mother was eager to return home; but the devotees would not allow her before the

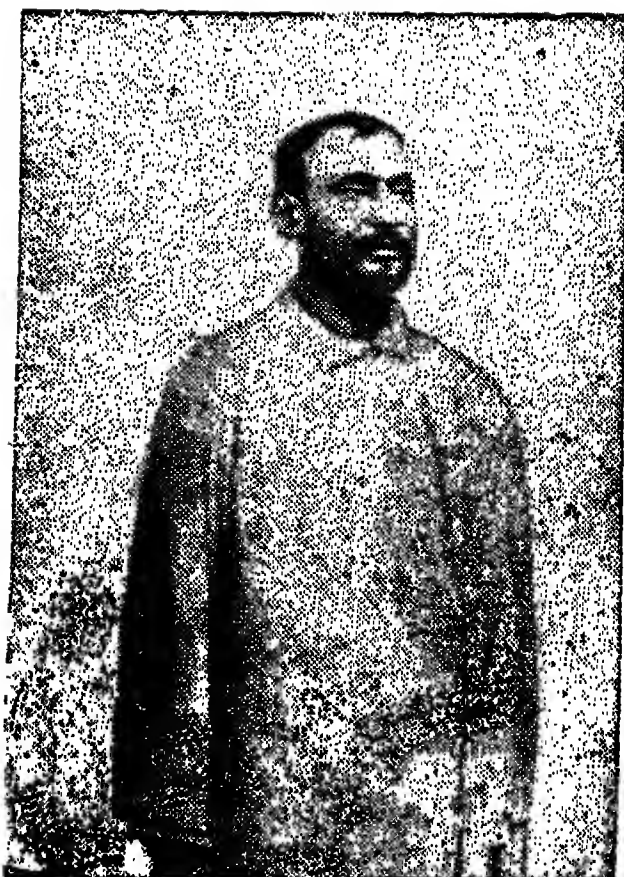
worship of Kali. Accordingly, she prolonged her stay and left Calcutta on the 24th of Kartika (10th November). She went home via Vishnupur. The people at Jayram-bati were informed well in advance to keep ready a palanquin at Desra. But the uncles did nothing, and as a consequence the Mother and her companions had great difficulty in walking home in a dark night. We have already narrated this event in the chapter 'A Self-imposed Limitation'. The Mother's health was bad at that time, and yet she had to be busy about her brothers' household duties. Hence the Calcutta devotees sent Golap-Ma and Kusumkumari with her. Golap-Ma left for Calcutta when the Mother had recovered a little.



HOLY MOTHER AT FIFTY-TWO



HOLY MOTHER AT FIFTY-EIGHT



SWAMI YOGANANDA



SWAMI SARADANANDA

SWAMI SARADANANDA

Many years had elapsed since the Master departed from this life, during which period the number of disciples of the Mother had increased considerably. Many of them visited her at Jayrambati. Among them, Dr. Jnanendranath Kanjilal went there in the first quarter of 1908 with some essential medicines for the free treatment of the villagers, many of whom were benefited by his presence. His name having spread to remote villages, every day the crowd at his door was quite considerable. Noticing this, the Mother said with pride. 'My gifted son has come; why shouldn't people gather?' The villagers expressed their gratitude to the doctor in various ways, and at the time of his departure the Mother saw him off personally, accompanying him to the border of the village.

The Mother was in indifferent health in those days. She had a renewed attack of her old trouble, rheumatism; and in addition to this, she was attacked by malaria soon after Dr. Kanjilal left. The temperature rose so high that it caused grave anxiety to all. During one night, she was thus talking in a delirium: 'I have to go. No. Why?—For Radhi. Well, let it be so.' It seemed as though she was talking with the Master; the Mother wanted release; but the Master asked her to stay on for Radhu's sake. However that might have been, Dr. Kanjilal had left behind certain specific medicines for certain common diseases, one of which was administered to her whereupon she recovered.

Even while the Mother lived in her village home, Swami Saradananda kept himself informed of her welfare through letters or messengers, and sent her money as occasion demanded. Furthermore, he was always eager to keep her in Calcutta; but he would not do anything against her slightest wish. This time, too, when she fell ill, he proposed more than once to bring her to Calcutta; but the Mother refused. In the meantime, there

had been a great change in Calcutta. When the Mother came to Calcutta, she had often to live in the houses of devotees. She was, of course, noted for her endurance and adaptability; but it pained Swami Saradananda to find her personal freedom smothered in others' houses. Moreover, of late, many of her relatives and women devotees had been moving about with her; and for most householders it was difficult to accommodate so many people at a time or for any long period. The expenses, too, were not inconsiderable. To arrange for rented houses was not easy for penniless monks like Swami Saradananda; and suitable houses were not always available at the proper time or place. Often enough, the houses were away from the Ganges thereby causing inconvenience to the Mother who had to have her daily bath in its holy waters. Besides, a permanent house was necessary to locate the offices for the Bengali periodical *Udbodhan* and to accommodate its staff. Taking into consideration all these factors, Swami Saradananda decided to launch on a bold scheme—he would have a permanent brick-built house at Baghbazar.

Kedarchandra Das had gifted away to the Belur Math on the 18th of July, 1906, a small plot of land (measuring about 260 sq. yards.) on the Gopal Neogi Lane, in Baghbazar, not very far from the Ganges. At first it was proposed to have a tiled shed on this land for the *Udbodhan*. But Swami Saradananda stood for a small brick structure. To start with he had in hand a meagre fund of Rs. 2,700/- got together through the sale of Swami Vivekananda's books, which amount, it was found on calculation, would not carry him beyond the foundation. Still he was sanguine of finishing the structure through loans. Such boldness did not go unchallenged, to be sure. But depending on the Mother's grace, he borrowed Rs. 5,700/- and started building at the end of 1907. But as the work proceeded, he had to borrow more money; and at last through his determination and bold execution, the *Udbodhan* got, at a cost of eleven thousand rupees, a

permanent house to which it was shifted at the end of 1908. This house had then six rooms on the ground floor, three on the first, and one on the second, or ten rooms in all. The lowest rooms were meant for the *Udbodhan* and the others for the Mother and her companions. The Mother was at Jayrambati at that time and did not like to come even though the news of the completion of the house reached her.

One incident which took place in the middle of March 1909, is worth mentioning here. Swami Yogavinode of Kankurgachhi, celebrated the Master's birthday at Kamarpukur at that time, and to make it a complete success took the Holy Mother there. She enjoyed it immensely.

Just after the celebration there arose a new situation at Jayrambati. For meeting it adequately, the Holy Mother requisitioned the services of the most dependable and level-headed of her sons, Swami Saradananda. The Mother had been acting as the guardian of her brothers who lived in a joint family. But as the brothers and their wives grew up and their families expanded, differences and tensions developed, as a result of which the brothers wanted to be separated; and the Mother also found that to be the only logical solution. For bringing about this settlement Swami Saradananda was invited to help with his personal presence.

On the 23rd of March, 1909, Swami Saradananda started for Jayrambati in the company of Yogin-Ma, Golap-Ma, and a Brahmachari and arrived there the next day. Then he spent a few days in visiting such places, as Navisan, Kamarpukur, etc. A remarkable trait in the Swami's character to be noticed at this time was that, though he had come evidently for a settlement of worldly affairs, he spent most of his time in talking about the Master or editing the *Jnana-yoga* of Swami Vivekananda.

The Mother used to be very busy at the time. In addition to her daily normal duty, she cooked some dishes

morning and evening for Swami Saradananda. And she attended to such minute details as levelling the unpaved courtyard where water might have created a depression. Seeing her so busy, the Brahmachari wanted to help her. But the Swami, who knew better, warned him that if he did any such thing, it would reflect discredit on the aunts who would be accused of being unmindful of their old sister-in-law.

When some days had thus passed away, Sri Kedar-nath Datta¹ of Koalpara was brought there to make measurement of the landed property. Kedar went on with his work, while Swami Saradananda's mind still followed its wonted habit of spiritual aloofness. After the lands had been measured, there arose the question of division, in which Swami Saradananda had to play a vital part. The documents were all in the keeping of uncle Kali; but uncle Prasanna wanted them to be in his own custody. Ultimately he proposed a division of the papers; Swami Saradananda, however, decided that lands and documents would be simultaneously dealt with. Uncle Prasanna was not reconciled to this; therefore, taking advantage of the Swami's momentary absence from the room where the talk was proceeding, he tried to snatch away the papers from his brother, and as a consequence a scuffle ensued. But as Swami Saradananda again stepped in, uncle Prasanna sat down gloomily. In fact, there was a repetition of what usually happens under such circumstances in many a joint family on the eve of disruption. And yet Swami Saradananda remained unruffled like the immobile Himalayas; and relying fully on his judgment and direction, the Mother kept her mind absolutely above these worldly turmoils. Drawing attention to this equipoise of the Mother based as it was on a spiritual insight, the Swami said to the Brahmachari, 'You have seen us often enough

1. Later on he became a monk under the name Swami Keshavananda and head of the monastery at Koalpara, which he had started as a lay worshipper.

—how we flare up at seeing our slightest wish disregarded. But look at the Mother. What a hell her brothers are creating and yet how calm and collected she is at all times!'

When the terms of the partition had been worked out, they had to be incorporated in a document. The arbitrators were Swami Saradananda, Sri Saradaprasad Chatterji of Tajpur, and Sri Shambhuchandra Roy of Jibta. Sri Chatterji asked the Mother through her brothers which house she would prefer to live in. She sent her answer: 'Rats bore holes and snakes live therein.' Sarada Babu, a man of the world, was not impressed by such sentimentalism; and he had it explained to her that the whole property—lands, houses, and all was being partitioned, and so if any house was not set apart for her, where would she live in Jayrambati? This time, too, the Mother's answer was, 'Some days I shall live in Prasanna's house and some days in Kali's.' Without further ado, Sri Chatterji allotted to uncle Prasanna's share the house where the Mother lived. The documents were executed and duly registered at Kotulpur. Then the uncles took possession of their respective shares. At last the Mother heaved a sigh of relief and told Yogin-Ma and Golap-Ma that she would go to Calcutta. Accordingly, Swami Saradananda fixed Friday, the 21st of May, as the day of departure.

It was decided that the bullock-carts carrying the party would reach Koalpara at four o'clock in the afternoon, and after a brief halt would proceed to Vishnupur. Of the four carts, one was occupied by the Holy Mother, Radhu and Maku; the second by Golap-Ma and Yogin-Ma; the third by Swami Saradananda; and the last by the Brahmachari and one Ashu from Jayrambati. When the carts reached Koalpara at about eight or nine o'clock in the night, the devotees of the village unyoked the bullocks from the Mother's cart and drew it themselves till they arrived at the house of Sri Kedarnath Datta. The Mother was taken for rest to the shrine of Kedar while others went to the local school-house. On inquiry

about the delay, it was learnt that the wheels of the carts got stuck up in the mud near the river at Shihar. The devotees had not anticipated such a long delay, and had arranged for light refreshments only. As it did not at all strike them that something should be done for the night meals, they went on talking leisurely with the Mother. The Jayrambati party, on the contrary, took it for granted that even without any suggestion from their side, the Koalpara people would arrange for their night meals. As a result of this misunderstanding time rolled on uselessly, when at last it dawned on the Jayrambati people that they had waited uselessly and it was better to move forward. Therefore, at the instance of the elders the Brahmachari cried out from the entrance of Kedar's house: 'It is getting extremely late.' The whole party at once hurried to the carts, which started immediately for Vishnupur. They halted at Kotulpur at about ten o'clock to procure from a sweetmeat seller some food with which they appeased their hunger in the temple premises of Shantinatha Siva. They reached Vishnupur next morning and entrained for Calcutta at night.

The 23rd of May, 1909, is a red letter day in the annals of the premises No. 1, Udbodhan Lane, Baghbazar, Calcutta; for on that day the Holy Mother set her sacred foot there. Swami Saradananda felt all his labour repaid when he saw the Mother established in her own house. The situation of the house might not have been attractive, but it was after the Mother's mind in many ways. The land in front was then an open field without any hutment, and served as a grazing ground for stray cattle. The Ganges was near at hand, a full view of which could be had from the terrace. And as one's eyes extended far to the north, one could have a sight of the tops of the tall village trees in the outskirts of the city. The Mother was overjoyed to see the house and blessed Swami Saradananda heartily.

On the altar in the shrine was placed the Master's picture over which was hung a silk canopy made by Sister

Nivedita. In the adjoining room there was a new couch for the Mother and near it an old bedstead for Radhu. The Mother disapproved of the arrangement saying, 'I can't live separated from the Master, nor is it proper.' So the two beds were placed in the shrine-room. The first night passed off this way. But next day, the Mother said that she felt uncomfortable on the couch without Radhu alongside of her, and Radhu, too, did not feel happy when alone. Accordingly, the couch was taken out and only the bedstead remained for both of them to sleep on. Thus in all affairs, big or small, Swami Saradananda considered himself a servant of the Mother and was ever ready to fulfil her slightest wish.

Here we must adduce certain facts to illustrate the devotion that the Swami had for the Mother, and the tenderness she had for him; for otherwise one cannot comprehend the important role that Swami Saradananda played in this divine drama.

In the beginning of 1920, during Swami Saradananda's stay in Banaras, when the Mother's going to Calcutta became imperative, she coolly said, 'There can be no question of my going to Calcutta unless Sarat is there. To whom am I to go? While I am there, if Sarat happens to say, "Mother, I am going out for a few days," I shall say, "Tarry a little, my son; let me first step out from this place and then you can start." Who but Sarat will bear my burden?' On another occasion she said, 'I can stay at that place so long as Sarat is there. After him I don't see any one who can shoulder my responsibility. Sarat can do so in every way. Sarat is my burden-bearer.' The hearer asked the Mother, 'Can't Maharaj (Swami Brahmananda) do so?' 'No,' replied the Mother, 'Rakhal is not of that temperament. He can't face troubles. He can do so intellectually or through some one. He is of a totally different make-up.' The questioner pursued, 'What about Baburam Maharaj (Swami Premananda)?' 'No,' replied the Mother, 'not even he.' 'But, as a matter of fact, he

is running the (Belur) Math.' 'Let it be so,' replied the Mother. 'Think of the responsibilities for a woman! He can make inquiries from a distance.' On another day she said, 'It is extremely difficult, my child, to stand up against my heavy pressure. Nobody excepting Sarat will be able to shoulder my burden.'

A devotee from Ranchi came and told the Mother, 'I have come to take you to Ranchi for some days. The fixing up of a house and other things have been arranged for.' 'Does Sarat know?' inquired she. 'No' replied the devotee. 'Then there can be no going for me,' clinched she. 'Sarat came and returned disappointed. Let me go to Calcutta first. If he advises, then this will be considered.' 'But, Mother,' pleaded the devotee, 'we have already made the arrangements.' The mother answered, 'Why did you arrange without informing me first?' When the devotee had left, she said, 'Look here, my child, people think it is very easy to take me. They know only sensation-mongering. On another occasion they printed leaflets that I would go to Dacca, though I knew nothing of it. They can serve me for a couple of days or so. Is it easy to assume my responsibility? I have yet to see any one except Sarat who can bear that burden. He is my Vasuki (the mythological serpent). What a lot of work he is doing by spreading his thousand hoods; wherever there is any rainfall, he spreads his umbrella (hood) to protect me.'

Sri Surendranath Mazumdar once approached the Mother with his brother Sri Sourendranath Mazumdar for initiation. As the Mother was ill, she asked them to come a few days later. But finding Surendra inflexible, she said, 'Go to Sarat; it will be as he advises.' The devotee still expostulated, 'We don't know anybody else; it is to you that we have come, and you must grant us this.' 'What do you mean?' said the Mother in reply. 'Sarat is my crest-jewel. It shall be as he will decide.' The Mother spoke with such emphasis that the devotees found no way out but to obey; and hence they approached Swamī

Saradananda for his approval. But he too argued that it was impossible to arrange for initiation so long as the Mother was in ill health. Then the devotees related the whole incident, on hearing which the Swami kept silent for a while and then said, 'You say that the Mother spoke thus? Well, you come prepared on such a day.'

Though Swami Saradananda received so much honour from one whom he considered the sheet-anchor of his life, yet he was never proud. He was then writing his masterpiece, the *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Lilaprasanga*, with the proceeds of which he hoped to liquidate the debt he had incurred. One day as he opened his papers to begin the daily work, a devotee came and prostrated himself before him. The Swami looked up and inquired with an amused smile, 'Why this ceremonious salute of yours?' The devotee replied, 'How you talk, sir? Whom else shall I salute if not you?' Humility incarnate as the Swami was, he replied, 'I also implore and wait for her favour by whom you have been blessed. She can even at this moment seat you here in my place if she so desires.'

The Swami considered himself a mere door-keeper at the Mother's house. But this self-imposed duty was not always a pleasant one. One summer noon Sri Surendranath Roy, a devotee from Barisal, walked from his residence on Harrison Road to the Mother's house, a distance of about three miles, and arrived there just when the Mother had come in and was taking rest. Though Surendra was tired and wet with perspiration, he was so eager to see the Mother that he tried to walk straight up the stairs without waiting for formalities. But there stood Swami Saradananda blocking the way and saying, 'I can't allow you to go to the Mother now; she has just returned and is tired.' 'Is the Mother a monopoly of yours?' blurted out the devotee in a fit of ill humour and walked up pushing the Swami aside. But once in the Mother's presence, he became penitent and thought, 'Bless God, that I may not meet him when going down.' He related the whole inci-

dent to the Mother, who consoled him saying that neither could her children be really guilty, nor could her sons be offended. Still he descended with trepidation and a guilty conscience to find to his dismay the Swamy still there at his post. Surendra saluted him and begged to be forgiven for the offence. But Swami Saradananda embraced him warmly and said, 'What offence can there be? Can one see the Mother unless one is so earnest?'

Within a few weeks after her arrival at the new house, the Mother had an attack of chicken-pox (middle of June 1909), for the treatment of which she was put under a priest of the Sitala temple in Baghbazar Street. The brahmin came every day and the Mother bowed down before him after throwing the hem of her cloth round her neck like a devout lady, and took the dust of his feet. One day an attendant remonstrated that it ill befitted her to be so obsequious; moreover, the brahmin might as well be loose in character. The Mother merely replied, 'The fact is that he is a brahmin in spite of everything. One should have due respect for his robes; the Master did not, in fact, come to destroy.' When she recovered, she told Swami Shantananda, 'My body is so weak that I can't undertake a fast; you do so on my behalf for Shitala's favour and offer worship to Her.' The Swami fasted as he was directed and worshipped Shitala near Chitpore.

After recovery, the Mother used to be taken in Lalit Babu's carriage to different places along with Golap-Ma and Yogin-Ma. Thus she visited the Parshwanatha temple, Ramrajatala, Navagopal Babu's house in Howrah and many such places. She went twice to the Yogodyana at Kankurgachhi (21st of August and 6th of September). She was present on the 12th of September at the Minerva Theatre where the *Pandava-Gaurava* was staged. When the Divine Mother appeared and the song 'Look at the goddess who enchants the heart of Shiva' etc., began, she fell into *samadhi*. Girishchandra enacted the role of Kanchuki in the performance.

Golap-Ma now shifted permanently to the Mother's new house, and she slept with the mad aunt in the room adjoining the Mother's room to the west. In that room the Mother made betel rolls and rubbed oil on her body before bath. The southern room was then used for dining purposes. Yogin-Ma used to come twice every day and lend a helping hand to Golap-Ma in all kinds of domestic duties such as measuring out stores and dressing vegetables for the kitchen.

During the Mother's stay in the new house there was a *Kirtana* by Sri Jatindranath Mitra at the house of the Dattas at 1, Lakshmi Datta Lane. The Mother and some women devotees went there on invitation. Jatindra was not a professional singer, but he had a sweet voice. The subject for the *kirtana* that day was the separation of the *gopis*, the sweethearts of Krishna, from him. It was all a wail of agony, and all were impressed both by the melody and by the sentiments. The Holy Mother, behind the screen, was in a state of semi-consciousness. The time now came for the performer to depart, for he had to catch a train for another place. Finding that the sitting was about to be closed with a final song of separation, the Mother, still in her spiritual afflatus, had it communicated to the singer that the *kirtana* should end with a song of union. Jatindra obliged her and took leave. But the last song, with its charming sentiments, tune, cadences, and richness of voice carried the Mother's mind to another level of existence, so much so, that she sat quietly where she was, totally lost to the environment. Golap-Ma, who was acquainted with such inebriation lifted up the Mother laying hold of her hands and led her to the carriage after some nominal refreshment. She noticed that the Mother had still no control over her feet which faltered at every step; and so she had to be bodily lifted to the carriage. On reaching the 'Udbodhan' house, she was led up the stairs by two of her attendants to the shrine-room, where, too, she stood still without a wink in her eyes and any

response to outer call. Noticing this, Golap-Ma remarked, 'I witnessed this mood of the Mother at Vrindaban, and here I see it again.' Finding that the Mother's mind refused to return to the normal plane, the devotees decided that since she had incarnated as a Mother for the sake of her children, the call 'Mother' might bring her round. So one attendant kept on repeating that word in her ears till there was some quivering of the body and then she said in a clear tone, 'Why, my son?' The devotees now drew sighs of relief, and the Mother then engaged herself in offering food to the Master in the normal way.

Swami Saradananda's works were multifarious — the service of the Mother, Secretaryship of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, writing of the *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Lilaprasanga* for the repayment of the loan, and courteous reception of the devotees coming to pay their respects to the Mother. Over and above all these, he sang for the Mother whenever ordered by her. When the evening service was over and she had finished her *japa*, she sent word that she would like to hear a few devotional songs. The musical instruments were near at hand in the drawing-room which also served as the Swami's office. He got hold of somebody to play on them and sang with a sweet voice such songs about the Divine Mother or about Shiva as the Mother liked.

The Mother spent about six months in the new house and then left for Jayrambati on the 16th of November, 1909. In the same year, on the 14th of December, the Swami purchased an adjacent plot measuring about 100 sq. yds. for Rs. 1,800/- for the extension of the house. Later on, at the beginning of 1915, the present house of the Holy Mother was completed by adding a few more rooms to the earlier ones.

On her way home, the Mother got down at Koalpara. The devotees of the place spread lotuses over the path that she was to tread. She walked over them to the place of resting. There she had her bath and some light refreshment

and then started for home. She visited Koalpara again on her return journey to Calcutta after some seven or eight months. Kedar's mother accompanied her to Calcutta, and the rumour went round that the Mother intended to go to the South on a pilgrimage.

She stayed in her Calcutta house till the beginning of December. It was very cold then, and the devotees wanted her to put on a warm Guernsey frock. Accordingly, a good frock was obtained from a foreign shop for Rs. 10/- given by Swami Saradananda. The Mother was apparently delighted to have it and used it for three days. But on the fourth day, she spoke out her mind frankly, 'My son, is it becoming of a woman to wear a frock? And yet I have worn it for three days to please you.' With these words she took it off and never again wore it. But though she did not use any frock or bodice, she wrapped her cloth round her body and tied it into a fine knot under the arms in such a way that the whole body remained covered. In fact, it was remarkable how she avoided luxury despite her command over resources and how she maintained her old-fashioned, rural simplicity in the midst of metropolitan finery.

IN THE SOUTH

For one reason or another the date of the Mother's departure for the South Indian pilgrimage was repeatedly being postponed. However, Balaram's wife Krishnabhavini Devi had been cherishing the desire for a long time; and she also entertained the hope of taking the Holy Mother to their estate at Kothar in Orissa and keeping her there for some time. It was finally settled that the Mother would start for Kothar on the 18th of Agrahayana (November-December), 1910, with Golap-Ma, Ramakrishna Babu's mother (Krishnabhavini) and his aunt, the mad aunt Surabala and her daughter Radhu, Brahmachari Shukul (Swami Atmananda), Brahmachari Krishnalal, Sri Ramakrishna Bose, and other devotees. The Mother and her women companions travelled by second-class while the men travelled by inter class. At Bhadrak station Tulasiram, brother of Swami Premananda, was present with men and palanquins and conducted them to Ramakrishna Babu's estate office. After some rest, they went to Kothar, about eighteen miles away. Swami Achalananda joined them there in a few days. The whole party felt immensely happy at this place; but the condition of the mad aunt Surabala worsened owing to the mental strain consequent on living in a stranger's house. Hence she had to be sent back to Jayrambati.

One member of the Mother's party had adopted a very strict regimen for himself for a couple of months, his argument being that he was following the Mother in her austerity. But the Mother one day served plenty of good food on his plate despite his protest and advised him to eat it all. The devotee obeyed for the time being; but in the afternoon he asked the Mother in the course of a discussion, 'Why do you deny yourself the things you serve me so plentifully?' The Mother replied, 'Do I eat through one mouth? Don't be silly. I tell you, you shall eat.' From that day his hesitation was over.

Because of the Mother's presence, the worship of Saraswati was performed that year with great eclat. On that occasion, Ramakrishna Babu and his wife took *mantra* from the Mother. Three devotees from Shillong—Suren-drakanta Sarkar, Hemantakumar Mitra, and Birendra-kumar Mazumdar—were initiated on the same day. Sri Devendranath Chatterji, postmaster of Kothar, who had embraced Christianity in youth under a blind impulse, now felt repentant, and wishing to return to the Hindu fold, consulted many about the possibility of a reconversion. The news reached the ears of the Mother who opined that if he performed a purificatory rite before the image of Radha-Shyama-Chand, the tutelary deity of the Kothar family, on the eve of the Saraswati worship, and then recited the *Gayatri mantra* and wore the sacred thread he would be re-established in his brahminhood. Following her injunctions, Devendra Babu shaved his head, performed the purificatory rite, and received the *Gayatri mantra* and the sacred thread from Brahmachari Krishnalal. Then he approached the Mother in all humility for initiation, which she gladly granted him on the day of the worship of Saraswati, and blessed him by presenting him a piece of cloth.

On the night of the worship there was an opera in which there was no dialogue but only music, dance, and a little acting. Two boys, who played the leading roles of Radha and Krishna, had such sweet voices and charming poses, that the Mother was highly attracted and wanted the performance to be repeated the next day. Ramakrishna Babu gladly complied. The immersion of the Devi's image was also put off to the third day, worship being performed again on the second.

One incident at Kothar is highly illuminating. The Mother used to take some rest after the midday meal, and then she sat in the rear of the house with an attendant, to have her letters written. A few days after the above incidents, the attendant found on going there for his duty

that the Mother sat absent-mindedly with her legs outstretched and eyes looking vacantly at something at a distance. After spending about a quarter of an hour in this mood she woke up to her surroundings and finding the attendant there, asked, 'How long have you been here?' 'Not long', replied he. The Mother then went on in her own mood, 'To come down again and again! Is there no respite? Siva and Sakti move together; where there is Siva, there is Sakti — there's no escape! Yet people don't understand.' The talk continued in this strain for a pretty long time. Among other things the Mother said that the Master has to incarnate from age to age for the good of his creatures; for they are his to be sure. In this connection she alluded to one of her personal experiences. She once saw that the Master had become everything — the blind, the maimed, all were he; the miseries of the creatures were his; and so the Mother too, had to share in the alleviation of their sufferings. When her heart was caught up in this flow of infinite compassion, she had to forgo her rest and sleep, and it seemed to her then that the only rational course to follow was to give up personal comfort and think out means for the welfare of all creatures. As a consequence when all were resting, she knew no repose. As the talk flowed on thus on a transcendental level, the vesper bells of the temple apprised her of the time of the day, and she rose hurriedly for the evening services.

It was arranged that from Kothar the Mother would go on a pilgrimage to Rameshwara in the extreme south. When the proposal was first mooted, the Mother said, 'I shall go; my father-in-law went there.' When the final decision had been taken, Swami Ramakrishnananda in Madras and Swami Saradananda in Calcutta were informed. Swami Saradananda heartily approved of it, and Swami Ramakrishnananda extended a cordial invitation, intimating at the same time his willingness to shoulder all responsibility. So it was settled that the pilgrims would start in the middle of February. The party consisted of

Holy Mother, Brahmacharis Shukul and Krishnalal, Golap-Ma, Ramakrishna Babu's mother and aunt, Kedar's mother, Radhu, and the attendant mentioned earlier, as also the mad aunt Surabala who was brought back by the Mother on the eve of the departure. They started by the south-bound Madras Mail, Ramakrishna Babu accompanying them up to the Khurda Road junction, from where he went to Puri.

Leaving Khurda Road behind, the train proceeded south-west and steamed along the shores of the vast Chilka lake over whose surface ripples danced under the soft morning breeze. Here and there, cranes waking with the dawn were searching for food in shallow water or darting across the blue sky in formation. Round the small islands that dotted the lake, flew various kind of birds such as the *nilakanthas* (blue-necked jays). At the sight of the latter, the Mother became overjoyed like a girl and saluted with folded hands, for such a sight of the bird augured well. With the appearance of the sun, white masses of vapour of various shapes began to rise up and lend an eerie atmosphere to the scene. The train speeded on, and the passengers looked out through the windows towards the fast changing landscape, the vast expanse of the lake giving place to wooded undulating land. Gradually, at eight in the morning the train reached Berhampore, the head-quarters of the Ganjam district. The Bengali Manager of Messrs Kelner and Company was present at the platform in accordance with Swami Ramakrishnananda's request; and he took the whole party to his house with great courtesy. In the afternoon, a great number of people gathered to pay their respects to the Mother. They prostrated themselves before her after offering her plantains, cocoanuts, and such other fruits. The pilgrims resumed their journey next day and passed by Vishakhapatnam in the afternoon. This health-resort and port town, hanging on the sides of a hillock, attracted the Mother by its beauty; and she said with joy, 'See, see, it

looks just like a picture.' They reached Madras next day at about noon.

At Madras station, Swami Ramakrishnananda and a number of devotees were present to give a fitting reception to the Holy Mother. As the train steamed in, they raised a loud cry of *jaya* (victory) and elation. A two-storeyed house had been rented near the Ramakrishna Math at Mylapore, where the Mother and her companions were taken. Here she lived for about a month during which period she visited the Kapalishwara and the Parthasarathi temples, the beach, the aquarium which was then still incomplete, and the fort. At the last place she drove in a rickshaw for the first time in her life. She used to go out every evening visiting various places of interest.

At her own temporary residence there was a continuous stream of eager souls who wanted to be sanctified—by touching her feet. One day the girls of a local school came to sing religious songs in Tamil and play on their violins and this pleased the Mother very much. Many were initiated by her at this place. Whether it was due to the basic unity of the Indian culture or the Mother's incomprehensible power of transmitting ideas, she could make the new-comers understand the *mantras* and the processes of *japa* and meditation without the help of interpreters, whose assistance she took for other purposes.

In a few days, the Mother's nephew Ramlal arrived at Madras for visiting Rameshwara, and it was decided that the whole party would start for Madurai, famous for its temple of the goddess Minakshi. But just then Ramakrishna Babu's aunt fell ill, and the departure had to be postponed. But it was soon found out that the lady would take a long time to recover. Hence after making adequate provision for her treatment and nursing, the others started on their journey. Through Swami Ramakrishnananda's scrupulous care for providing all possible comfort, the

whole party had second-class accommodation in the train, and he himself accompanied them to see personally to their conveniences. The train reached Madurai in the morning, and they were taken to the house of the Chairman of the local Municipality.

Madurai stands on the river Vaigai. The chief temple there, dedicated to the goddess Minakshi and her consort Sundareshwara (Siva), holds a very high place in Indian architecture. Its tall *gopurams* or gate-towers, rising up in tiers, are very impressive because of their height, grandeur, and sculpture. The mythological anecdotes represented in stone everywhere in the temple precincts keep the devout pilgrims spell-bound for hours together. The image of the goddess appears so lifelike and inspiring that it is difficult to find a second one of its kind. For the disport of the two deities, there are a few permanent stone-pavillions (*mandapas*) of which the *sahasra-stambha* (thousand pillared) and *Vasanta* spring) *mandapas* are the best. There is a small pond built in stone called the Shiva-ganga. The Mother and others bathed in it in the afternoon and then visited the deities. Then, in accordance with the local custom, they lighted up lamps on the banks of the pond in each one's name before returning to their residence. During their stay at Madurai, they visited among other places the palace of Tirumal Nayaka and the large tank called Teppakulam (1000' × 950'). The extensive roof of the palace is supported by 125 stone pillars. In the centre of the tank there is a small island. All these sights made the Mother exclaim, 'How wonderful is the play of the Master!'

From Madurai they entrained for Rameshwara and reached Mandapam at noon from where they had to cross over in a steamer to the Pamban (or Rameshwara) island. From Pamban, which is also the name of the port across the strait, they again boarded a train and reached Rameshwara at about eleven in the night. As the temple was closed, they saluted the Deity from outside and went to live

in the quarters arranged for them by the priest-guide Gargam Pitambara. Next morning they bathed in the sea and entered the temple, which in its massiveness and extensiveness seems to be unparalleled. It is built of stone. Round the *sanctum sanctorum* there are three successive encircling corridors. The outermost one is seventeen feet wide and measures 645 feet from east to west and 395 feet from north to south. The middle one is 500 feet and 300 feet respectively. At the entrance of the whole structure is a huge *gopuram*, every inch of which is full of fine sculpture. The story of Siva, the presiding Deity of the temple, is told in stone pillars and walls that line the corridor. On entering the innermost corridor, one finds in front the stone image of *Nandi* (Siva's bull) which is as high as an one-storied building; and near the *Nandi* is a tall pillar. The emblem of Rameshwara is placed in a small basin (*kunda*). As the image is made of soft sandy material, it is kept covered by a golden cap over which the *abhisheka* (bathing) water is poured. But early in the morning, one can have a look at the uncovered image. For the daily *abhisheka* and for other rites of the daily worship of Rameshwara, Ganges water alone is permitted. This is brought from North India with considerable effort, and is sold to pilgrims in small quantities to be poured over the covered emblem of Shiva.

Then the Pamban island, as also the Rameshwara temple, was under the administrative control of the Raja of Ramnad who was a disciple of Swami Vivekananda. He had instructed the temple staff by telegram that as the guru of his guru would be visiting the shrine, all facilities should be offered to her. As a consequence, the Holy Mother and her party were taken to the *sanctum sanctorum*, contrary to the general custom, and were allowed to worship the uncovered Siva image to their heart's content with Ganges water, flowers, etc. The Mother offered one hundred and eight golden leaves shaped like the real leaves of the *bel* tree. During all the three days that they stayed

there, they visited the temple every morning and evening. On the third day the Holy Mother arranged for a special worship at the temple, fed the *pandas* after hearing a recital of the glory of Rameshwara from old scriptures; and she presented to each of the *pandas* a water-pot. It is customary to sit with betel and betel-nut in hand at the time of hearing Rameshwara's exploits and offer them to the reader at the end. The Mother faithfully observed all the customs.

The temple staff had been instructed by the Raja to show the temple jewellery to the Mother and present her any piece that she might ask for. When the Raja's wishes were communicated to the Mother she was at a loss to think out what she might really be in need of; and so she said after a pause, 'What can I need? Whatever was necessary has been arranged for by Sashi (Swami Ramakrishnananda).' And then it struck her that such a refusal might offend them; and hence she corrected herself, 'Well, if Radhu has any need of anything, she will take it.' And to Radhu, she said, 'See, if you can choose anything you may have need of.' The Mother said so out of courtesy; but when the treasury was opened and the gems and diamonds glittered up, her heart began to throb and she kept on praying, 'Master, may not Radhu have any temptation.' The Master heard her. After looking at everything, Radhu said, 'What is there worth taking from all this stuff? I don't want any of these. I have lost my writing pencil; buy one for me.' At this the Mother was immensely relieved and came out to purchase from a roadside shop a pencil worth half an anna.

Brahmachari Krishnalal, who was an attendant of the Mother and who visited Rameswara with her, said to Sarala Devi one day, that on looking at the uncovered Siva image the Mother soliloquized, 'It is just as I had left it.' The devotees that were near at hand inquired, 'What did you say, Mother?' The Mother at once corrected herself and said, 'A meaningless something escaped out of my

lips.' After the party had returned to Calcutta, one day Kedar Babu of Koalpara asked the Mother at the 'Udbodhan', 'How did you find Rameshwara?' And the Mother replied, 'He is just as I had left him, my son.' Then the ever alert Golap-Ma was passing by the verandah. As soon as these words fell on her ears, she stopped and asked with enthusiasm, 'What did you say, Mother?' Taken aback, the Mother said, 'Why, what should I say? I was only saying that I was very much delighted to see it just as I had heard from you.' But Golap-Ma was not to be put off so easily, and she said importunately, 'No, Mother, I have heard everything; it won't do to retract your words now. Isn't it, dear Kedar?' And she whisked away without waiting for a reply to tell everyone of the good tidings. The devotees believe that the same personage who incarnated in the Treta yuga as Sita, the ever faithful consort of Ramachandra, and worshipped a Siva image made of sand on the sea coast of Rameshwara, descended again as the all-enduring and ever gracious Holy Mother, so that the sudden sight of the uncovered image carried her mind unconsciously across the vast span of thousands of years and the past appeared as a vivid present; and forgetful of her immediate environment she made that spontaneous remark.

Dhanuskoti is another sacred place in the island, from where the bridge thrown across the sea by Sri Rama commences. It is customary to worship the sea by presenting a golden or silver bow and arrow. As the Mother could not go there, she sent two of her attendants with the silver bow and arrow to perform the worship on her behalf.

From Rameshwara they returned to Madurai, where they rested for a day, and then they proceeded to Madras. Now, the birthday of the Master approached; and the devotees took advantage of the Mother's presence to make the occasion a great day of joyful celebration. Some people were initiated by her on that day. After the cele-

bration, she left for Bangalore on the 10th of Chaitra (end of March), 1911.

In those days, the surroundings of the Ramakrishna Ashrama at Bangalore were quiet and charming. And even at the present time the Ashrama with its extensive grounds continues to preserve that solitude in spite of the rapid growth of the city. The compound is dotted with valuable fruit and flower trees. In front runs the wide Bull Temple Road leading to the temple of that name, which enshrines a huge image of *Nandi* and is visited by streams of pilgrims. The Mother and her women companions were accommodated in the Ashrama building, while the monks and devotees lived in temporary tents outside. As the news of the Mother's visit spread over the town, devotees began to come in great numbers, and the flowers they brought for offering sometimes formed big heaps.

At Bangalore the Mother stayed for about a week. One afternoon she was taken by Swami Vishuddhananda in a carriage to the cave temple of Gavipura, a short distance behind the Ashrama. The Mother got down and visited the temple and then returned to the Ashrama by the same carriage. The whole time spent outside was not long. But, whereas at the time of their going out, there was none there at the Ashrama besides the inmates, when they returned they found the whole compound crowded with a number of visitors. At the sound of the Mother's carriage they stood up instantaneously and then prostrated themselves on the ground. The Mother, who was visibly moved by the sight, alighted from the carriage and stood there motionless for about five minutes, extending her right arm in benediction. Perfect silence reigned all around, and the whole atmosphere was charged with awe. Then the Mother silently walked to the Ashrama and sat in the central room, where the devotees gathered. Here again was enacted that speechless transmission and imbibition of transcendental bliss that the scriptures speak of. There

was no question and no answer, and yet all doubts were resolved. Breaking that tangible silence, the Mother said to Swami Vishuddhananda who was by her side, 'What a pity, I don't know their language! What solace they would derive, if I could but speak a few words!' When Swami Vishuddhananda translated this for the devotees, they said, 'No, no; this is all right. Our hearts are full indeed. No words are needed on such an occasion.' Wonderful are the ways of the Mother and wonderful are those of her children!

Here is another incident. There is a small hillock behind the Ashrama building and within its own compound. A short while before dark, the Mother climbed the hillock along with one or two others and sat on its top enjoying the beauty of the setting sun. When Swami Ramakrishnananda heard of this, he said in amazement, 'Indeed! The Mother has become a dweller on the mountain (Parvatasini¹,' and hurried towards the place. He was stout, and began to pant as he climbed that low hillock; but undaunted he went up straight to the Mother, prostrated himself there and laying his head on her feet chanted three well-known verses from the *Chandi* beginning with *Sarva-mangala-mangalye* which are used as *mantras* for the salutation of the Divine Mother:

'O auspicious One, Thou art the source of all auspiciousness—Thou art the accomplisher of all cherished desires. Thou art the giver of refuge. Thou possessest the eye of wisdom and beautiful form. O Thou Power Divine, salutations to Thee.

'O eternal One, Thou art the energy of creation, preservation and destruction. Thou art the abode of threefold Cosmic energy and Thou art also its manifestor. O Thou Power Divine, salutations to Thee.

'O Mother, Thou art the saviour of the distressed and of the careworn, who take refuge in Thee. Thou art the remover of misery of all. O Thou Power Divine, salutations to Thee.'

1. Which is a name of the Divine Mother dwelling on the Himalayas or the Vindhya hills.

And he prayed 'Grace! grace!'. The Mother caressed his head, as though pacifying an importunate son, till Swami Ramakrishnananda felt himself fully blessed.

There was a funny incident at Bangalore. One day the Holy Mother, dressed in her own simple way, sat at one side of the central room and women visitors came to pay their respects to her. With them came a rich woman wearing fine clothes and costly ornaments. She took her seat in the centre of the room. A little later a group of women came, and finding the wealthy lady in the centre mistook her for the Mother. Therefore, they proceeded to salute her. The lady's protests were of no avail; the new-comers pressed on to touch her feet. At this the aristocratic lady jumped up and remonstrated vehemently. By that time, however, she was completely surrounded, and there was a scamper for the first touch of her feet, so that she had to extricate herself somehow and walk out. The Mother sat quietly at her corner all the while; and though she did not grasp one word of what the ladies spoke, she understood with a quiet smile the farce that was going on in front of her.

After spending some days at Bangalore, the Mother and her companions returned to Madras, where they spent a day or two and then started for Calcutta. On the way they rested a day at Rajahmundry where they were guests at the house¹ of Sri M. O. Parthasarathi Iyengar, District and Sessions Judge. The Mother bathed here in the Godavari. Their second halting place was Puri. This time they did not go to the Kshetra-basir Math, but went to Sashi-niketana, the other house of the Boses, where they spent some three or four days. At last they arrived at Calcutta on the 28th of Chaitra (middle of April), 1911.

1. The house is no longer in existence, the plot of land having been acquired by the Municipal Water Works.

The first day that the Mother set her holy feet on the grounds of the Belur Math, after her South Indian pilgrimage, she was given a fitting reception. As a result of the long sojourn, she had returned with better health and a happier mind, which gladdened the devotees also. Moreover, the wonderful news of the enthusiasm created in the South by her inspiring presence and silent ministration had preceded her. And hence all had gathered there to express their devout gratefulness for her unbounded love for her children. The gates of the Math were decorated with plantain trees, under which were placed tastefully painted pitchers, filled with water and with green leaves on the top. On either side of the path stood more than a hundred devotees with folded hands. As the carriage of the Mother came in sight a few crackers were burst, and as the Mother alighted and moved slowly with her women companions, the devotees chanted the *mantras* from the *Chandi*. The order of Swami Brahmananda, abbot of the Math, rang out that nobody should break the line to salute the Mother by touching her feet. So the Mother walked unhampered. Her whole body was covered from head to foot with a white cotton wrapper; and it seemed as though a sacred and animated white image had suddenly descended on the Math ground and was moving silently from south to north. Suddenly somebody seemed to dart out of the line and as quickly salute the Mother and disappear. 'Catch him, catch him. Who's that, who's that?' called out Swami Brahmananda in great amusement. It was none other than Swami Subodhananda, who, because of his being younger than most of the other disciples of Shri Ramakrishna and his simple nature, was called by the others Khoka Maharaj or the baby monk. This exploit of the Swami amused the company very much.

The Mother was taken to the main monastery building. A *kirtana* in honour of Kali was then in progress in the courtyard below, and Swami Brahmananda sat there. Suddenly it was seen that the Swami's body had become

absolutely motionless and his smoke pipe had dropped from his hand. As he did not come round from this state of divine trance, the Mother was informed, and she instructed some one to utter a *mantra* in the Swami's ears. This acted like magic, and the Swami came down to the normal plane with words of appreciation for the music, 'Bravo! Sing on, sing on', as though he had been unmindful just for a passing moment. The Mother was now offered some *prasada* of the Master. She took a little and sent down the rest of it, which the devotees eagerly shared amongst themselves. When in the evening she took leave, a few more crackers were burst to indicate the end of the happy day's function.

ANGLE OF VISION

Radhu was now of marriageable age; and so to perform her wedding ceremony the Mother left for Jayrambati on the 3rd of Jyeshtha (the 18th of May), 1911, and reached Koalpara on the 5th. Koalpara had now come to occupy an important place in the life-history of the Holy Mother. Between the years 1909 and 1919, the Mother rested here for some hours during all her travels between Jayrambati and Calcutta. She used to say, 'This is my parlour.' The inmates of the monastery were wholeheartedly devoted to her and felt blessed if they could do the least service to her. This time, when the news of her coming reached them, they constructed a temporary enclosure for her with palm leaves round the bathing place of the Badujye-pukur. They also tastefully decorated the new shrine-room, enclosed its verandah with screens, cleaned the road and covered it with cloth with flowers spread over. But the Mother had no time to spare. She hurriedly bathed and finished her midday meal, and then after a little rest started for Jayrambati with Radhu in the same palanquin. Before she bade farewell, she said tenderly to the inmates of the monastery, 'Now in these parts you are my mainstay. I see that the Master has in fact made a seat for himself here. And for us all, too, a resting place has come into existence.' When they all bowed down to her one by one, she touched their heads in benediction, and said, 'You all should go to Jayrambati now and then; and, in particular, you have all to go during Radhu's marriage. You will have to attend to all details of the arrangement there.'

In a few days Swami Saradananda, Golap-Ma, Yogin-Ma, and one or two Brahmacharis, reached Jayrambati via Koalpara. The marriage was fixed for the 27th of Jyeshtha (middle of June), 1911. The bridegroom was Manmathanath Chatterji who belonged to the landlord

family of Tajpur. The Chatterjis were richer than the Mukherjis of Jayrambati. But Swami Saradananda, who placed the Mother's happiness above everything else, spent money unquestioningly for adorning Radhu in a way befitting a bride entering a landlord's family; and other arrangements for the celebration were on a similar scale. The bridegroom's party took full advantage of their stronger position to extract from the Swami a considerable amount of dowry. But Kedarnath Datta of Koalpara, unable to restrain himself when unreasonable demands were being made, intervened off and on in the talk between the Swami and the bridegroom's party; and the Mother disliking this kind of wrangling and ruffled temper just on the eve of a happy union, called away Kedar Babu. Radhu entered the marriage pandal adorned with gold and silver from head to foot. Uncle Prasanna performed the ceremonial handing over of his niece to Manmatha. She was then past her eleventh year and Manmatha was in his fifteenth.

There was a feast on the next day. When the guests were returning home, the Mother stood at the backdoor and inquired if they had had enough. And they heartily replied, 'May the bride and the bridegroom live happily, Mother.'

At the time of Radhu's going to her father-in-law's house, the Mother gave her a big black box. At night the Master appeared to the Mother to say, 'So you have given away one thousand rupees that was in Radhu's box!' The Mother then remembered that she had that amount of cash in the box, but it had not been removed when the box was being handed over. Next day she sent her devotee Bibbutibhushan Ghosh and a monk and got back the money.

The Mother spared no pains to see that the minutest detail of that auspicious ceremony was duly performed. And yet, in spite of all these domestic engagements, we get from the above incident an inkling of the level of detachment in which her mind soared for ever. But lest the reader should interpret this as a case of ordinary forget-

fulness, we adduce another event which more aptly illustrates our point of view. It was well known that the Mother deeply loved Radhu. And hence it was as desirable for the devotees to see the girl enter a good family as it was for the Mother. Accordingly, one well-wisher once suggested to the Mother that since Master Mahashaya had in his classes many boys of well-to-do families, he could be asked to choose a suitable bridegroom. At this the Mother remarked, 'Let a groom be hit upon, as he may, in the ordinary course of things. I will never ask any one to fall into bondage (of wedlock).' Such was her life of non-attachment, notwithstanding her being outwardly involved in all sorts of household duties, that it was comparable to a lotus leaf untouched by the water on which it floats. Yet none could accuse her of ever neglecting any task.

Radhu's marriage at Tajpur was settled by her relatives before the Mother left for the South. But on seeing the horoscopes of the pair an astrologer expressed the fear that the girl might become a widow. Yet the Mother did not override a decision taken by Radhu's well-wishers. Long after the marriage, when Manmatha sought initiation, she at first declined saying that she would not give any *mantra* to any of her relations. But she yielded at last to his importunities. After making him a disciple, she remarked that though one should not interfere with divine dispensation, Radhu might, after all, escape her widowhood by the force of that initiation.¹

A little over two months after Radhu's marriage, the Ramakrishna Mission lost one of its chief luminaries; Swami Ramakrishnananda passed away at the 'Udbodhan' in Calcutta, on the 21st of August, 1911. When he felt that the end was near, he wanted to see the Mother. But after full deliberation, the Mother decided not to go. The tireless service that the Swami rendered to her in the South was.

1. Radhu did not actually lose her husband; but we shall see that her later life was as bad as widowhood, she being forced to live separated from her husband.

still fresh in her mind. How could the Mother bear the sight of the passing away of such a devoted son? And if she came to such a small house as the 'Udbodhan' with all her retinue, it would only add to the discomfort of the patient. Therefore, she sent back the messenger who had gone to Jayrambati for escorting her to Calcutta. Yet Swami Ramakrishnananda saw the Mother near his sick-bed and cried out, 'Mother has come!' Afterwards the poet Girish Babu composed a song about the Mother, taking the cue from the Swami, and the latter was highly delighted to hear it sung. Not long after, he entered the final beatitude. When the news reached Jayrambati, the Mother said sorrowfully, 'My Shashi is gone; my backbone is broken.'

When the devotees of Koalpara arrived at the Mother's house with vegetables on the occasion of the Jagad-dhatri worship that year, the Mother said joyfully, 'Greens and vegetables are not always available here, and hence one is put to great trouble at times. But, methinks, the Master will now provide everything through you'. When the devotees started to return after the worship, the Mother gave them a bundle of fried-rice and other eatables that had been offered to the deity. From that time on, the devotees sent vegetables twice or thrice every week whenever she happened to be at Jayrambati. The economic condition of the Koalpara Ashrama being bad, they could not engage anyone for carrying such loads; and hence after finishing the daily duties, they procured the necessary vegetables from the Ashrama garden or from the market and then carried the load on their own shoulders. At Jayrambati, again, if they found the Mother in need of any daily necessities, such as salt, oil, spices, wheat, etc., which could be had from villages some miles away, they volunteered with alacrity to obtain those things and carry them on their heads to her. When the devotees arrived, the Mother would direct them to leave the things in their proper places. At last they became so familiar with the arrangements there that they could do everything by themselves. When

at last they took leave of her by touching her feet, she blessed them saying, 'May you acquire knowledge; may you get faith and devotion,' and tied to their clothes some fried-rice for a light repast on the way. In fact, the Koalpara Ashrama became, as it were, a part and parcel of her own household for these few years. It had not even then been incorporated with the Ramakrishna Math at Belur.

As it had been settled that the Mother would go to Calcutta after the Jagad-dhatri worship, Brahmachari Prakash had been sent by Swami Saradananda to take her there. The 8th of Agrahayana (about November 23), 1911, was fixed as the date for the journey. A couple of days earlier, Kedar Babu (later Swami Keshavananda), the head of the Koalpara Ashrama, came to Jayrambati to make arrangements for the Mother's stay at that place. The Mother talked as she made betel rolls. When that part of the conversation was over, she said, 'Listen, my boy, as you have built a house for the Master and set up a resting place for us, I shall install the Master there when I pass through the Ashrama this time. Keep everything ready. You will have to carry on worship, offering of cooked food, vesper service, and all such functions regularly. What will you gain by the Swadesi movement¹ alone. The Master is the spring of all that we do or have; he is the ideal. Whatever you do, if you hold on to him, you will never go wrong.' The Ashrama was then a hot-bed of Swadeshi agitation; looms, spinning wheels and political talks being more in evidence than meditation, *japa*, worship, and study. As a result, the police had a sharp eye on the inmates. Nothing daunted, the head of the centre carried on with his bold programme. And hence he could not accept without question all that the Mother said. And yet he could not gather sufficient courage to contradict her openly. Therefore,

1. This political movement, set on foot on October 14, 1905, consisted in the boycotting of foreign, specially British, articles and encouraging home-made ones, even though the latter lacked beauty and fineness. It was a reaction against the autocracy of Lord Curzon, which manifested itself in its worst form in the partition of Bengal.

he argued indirectly: 'But, of a truth, Swamiji (Vivekananda) wanted us very much to work for the country, and he laid the foundation of selfless work by inspiring the youth of the country. What a lot of work would be done if he were alive now!' Carried away by the trend of his own thought, Kedar Babu unknowingly touched more than one chord in the Mother's heart. The symphony that he aroused thereby was equally sweet and full, and yet replete with deep spiritual meaning. Hardly had he finished when the Mother intervened, 'O my dear! If Naren (Vivekananda) were there today, would the Company¹ let him alone? They would lock him up in a jail. I couldn't have borne the sight. Naren was like an unsheathed sword. After his return from foreign countries, he said, "By your grace, Mother, I did not have to cross the ocean by jumping in this age², but went to those parts in their own ships; and there, too, I noticed, how great is the glory of the Master; what a number of good people have heard about him and accepted this idea from me with astonished eagerness!" They, too, are my children—don't you agree?' Kedar found no answer and kept silent. His first mistake was to support his own course of action by suggesting a false analogy with Swami Vivekananda, and his second error consisted in tending to convert his patriotism into a kind of dislike for foreigners. By the Mother's words he stood corrected, and it also dawned on him that selfless work cannot be properly carried on unless religion is accepted as its basis.

While on this topic, we shall be excused if we digress a little to give a fuller idea of the Mother's angle of vision. After the completion of her new house at Jayrambati in 1917, the Mother was living in it at the time of the

1. Though the East India Company was succeeded by the British Government after the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857, the old people continued for long to refer to the Government as the Company.

2. In search of Sita who was abducted by Ravana, King of Sri Lanka Sri Rama's messenger Hanuman crossed the strait between India and Sri Lanka jumping over it.

Durga worship. On that occasion she sent a Brahmachari to purchase some clothes to be presented to her nephews and nieces. He belonged to the Koalpara Ashrama and had imbibed a liking for country-made things. And so he purchased clothes made by the Indian mills, which were coarse and had no attractive borders. Naturally, the girls did not like them; they wanted finer clothes in exchange. The Brahmachari protested in disgust: 'Well, those are foreign clothes. To think that one can purchase them!' The Mother was there sitting in a corner. She heard everything and said with a smile, 'My boy, they (the foreigners), too, are my children. I have to carry on with all; can I afford to be one-sided? Bring for them the clothes just as they want.' And yet it was against her nature to do violence to anybody's feelings; and hence she never again sent this Brahmachari for purchasing foreign clothes; if the need arose, she asked somebody else to do so.

But liberal outlook and connivance at violence are as poles asunder. At the news of police ill-treatment towards Sindhubala and others, the Mother, though noted for her natural suavity, could hardly restrain her indignation. The wife and a sister of Deven Babu of the village Juthabihara in Bankura, had the same name Sindhubala. The sister was then in the family way. Under suspicion of complicity in subversive activity, the police wanted to arrest one of the Sindhubalas; but owing to identity of names they first took into custody the sister who was in her husband's village Sabajpur. And then they arrested the wife also. The news of these two arrests travelled from mouth to mouth till uncle Kali came in a very agitated mood and reported to the Mother that the police had treated the women inhumanly and made them walk the whole way; and that even when the villagers had protested and suggested that some transport should be arranged, the police had turned a deaf ear. At this cruel news the Mother cried in surprise, 'What do you say?' and her whole frame shook. Then

red with indignation she said, 'Is this an order of Company (Government) or an overzealous act on the part of the police? We never heard of such inhuman treatment towards innocent women in the reign of Queen Victoria. If this is an order from the Company, then it will be doomed soon. Was there no man there who could give them some slaps and snatch away the girls?' A little while after, when uncle Kali communicated to her the news of their release, she was somewhat pacified and said, 'If I had not heard this news, I would have no sleep tonight.'¹

On another occasion the Mother was at Koalpara. The first World War (1914-18) was raging. The devotee Prabodhchandra Chatterji came and made his obeisance to the Mother, who inquired about his health and general welfare, and then asked, 'Well, my dear, what's the news of the war? What a tremendous sacrifice of lives has there been—what a machine for killing have they invented! What a lot of instruments there are nowadays—telegraph etc. See, for instance, how Rashbehari (Swami Arupananda) started from Calcutta yesterday and arrived here today. How we toiled and trudged on to reach Dakshineswar (in those days).' Encouraged by this, Prabodh Babu enthusiastically eulogized the achievements of science and said, 'The British Government has increased the general welfare in our country.' The Mother heard the whole speech and then remarked, 'But, my son, there is now in our country a greater want of food and clothing. Formerly there was no such paucity of food.'

Let us now pass on to another occasion. There was a great scarcity of cloth all round. The women could not come out of their houses for want of clothes to cover their

1. We do not narrate the Sindhubala incident as a historian does, but just as it was communicated to the Mother. Basically it was true and took place in 1917-18. Newspapers, then, were not so much in vogue in the villages, and as news travelled by word of mouth, there were chances of distortion so far as details were concerned. We are here primarily concerned not with authentic history but with the Mother's reactions to the reports presented to her.

bodies with; and news of suicides for this reason was being frequently published in the daily papers. One day, as somebody mentioned to the Mother about some of these sad events, she was so much moved that at first tears trickled down her cheeks; and at last no longer able to check her emotion, she cried out in agony, 'When, indeed, will they (the English) go? When will they?' When she cooled down a little, she said with regret, 'In those days there were spinning wheels in every house, cotton was cultivated in the fields, all spun and wove their own clothes, there was no dearth of cloth. But the Company came and destroyed it all. The Company promised ease—one could have four pieces of cloth for a rupee and one more in the bargain. All became *babus* (ease-loving); the spinning wheel went out of vogue. And now have all the *babus* become *kabu* (in a tight corner).' We have to remember that the non-cooperation movement of Mahatma Gandhi with its concomitant, the revival of the spinning wheel, was yet to come.

The Mother's heart was moved by the country's miseries; at times her eyes were blood-red at the iniquities of the foreign exploiters, or shed profuse tears at their heartless oppression. But as an ultimate remedy to all the sorrows she clung to the Master and asked others also to do so. In fact, all her thoughts and deeds centred on Sri Ramakrishna. Those were the days of the Swadesi movement; so, when one patriot asked her, 'Mother, will not the trials and tribulations of this country ever end?' the Mother replied that the Master had come for that very purpose. Accordingly, though she was attracted by the practical enthusiasm of the devotees of Koalpara, she decided that the Master should be installed in the Ashrama as its presiding deity, for otherwise the workers would soon be swept off their moorings. That was why she wanted to initiate the Master's worship there on her way to Calcutta.

That was the middle of November when it is cold in the morning. But as the Mother had to perform the

Master's worship at Koalpara, she started early by a palanquin; and Lakshmi Devi, Maku, and Radhu, and Radhu's husband Manmatha followed her in separate palanquins, while the mad aunt, Nalini Devi, Bhudev and others travelled by bullock-carts. And there was Brahmachari Prakash as the manager of the party.

The Koalpara devotees made adequate arrangements for the Master's worship. The Mother bathed after arriving there, and then placing on the altar the Master's photograph, and by its side her own, she worshipped them duly. Brahmachari Kishori (afterwards Swami Parameshwarananda) performed the *homa* at her bidding. When the installation of the Master was over, all took *prasada*. After this and before the midday meal the Mother walked with her nieces Lakshmi and Nalini to Kedar's house at a little distance. When Brahmachari Prakash came to know of this, he became annoyed and said to the local devotees, 'You know nothing of the Mother's position and prestige. Why did you make her walk without my knowledge? Anyway, you should bring her back in a palanquin.' But not waiting for his order to be executed, he went with a palanquin and two Ashrama inmates to bring her. They met the Mother on the way and Brahmachari Prakash requested her to get into the palanquin, which she did without a murmur. But on arriving at the Ashrama she reproached him saying, 'This is our rural resort. Koalpara is my parlour. These are all my own boys. I want to be a little free in my movements so long as I am here. When I come from Calcutta, I heave a sigh of relief. There you keep me shut up in a cage—I am always under restraint. If here, too, I have to toe the line, well, I shan't be able to do so—you may inform Sarat (Saradananda) accordingly.' Then the Brahmachari begged her pardon explaining that in his enthusiasm to see that there was no lack of attention on his part, he had been guilty of unwittingly curtailing her liberty.

It was planned that the journey should be resumed after six o'clock in the evening, and the food to be taken on the way should be made ready by then. But in spite of their best efforts, the Ashrama people could not finish their work in time. As this irritated the Brahmachari, they suggested that the Calcutta party might start according to schedule, and that they would somehow overtake them with the food on the way. The Mother, who heard it all, reprehended the Brahmachari thus: 'What makes you lose your balance and take them to task like that? This is village atmosphere; can everything be got ready by the clock as in Calcutta. Don't you notice how diligently the boys have been working from the morning? Whatever you may say, there will be no moving out of here before finishing our meals.' Accordingly, all had to wait and start for Vishnupur after food at eight o'clock in eight bullock-carts.

AT BELUR AND BANARAS

The Mother was expected to come to the Belur Math on October 16, 1912, on the evening of the *Bodhana*¹. Evening was advancing, and yet there was no sign of the Mother's coming; and so Swami Premananda was moving about in a flurry. At the gate he saw that the plantain trees and sacred pitchers had not been arranged as yet, and he said, 'These things have not been done as yet; how can the Mother come?' No sooner was the ceremonial awakening of the Deity finished than was seen the Mother's carriage at the gate. The monks and devotees led by Swami Premananda ran up at once, unharnessed the horses, and drew the carriage into the courtyard. As the Swami was thus engaged, one could see him trembling with emotion, joy scintillating from his eyes, face, and every limb. When the carriage stopped Golap-Ma carefully helped the Mother out of it. The Mother then looked around with beaming eyes and said, 'Everything is ready tip-top. It is as though we ourselves have come attired like the goddess Durga.' From that day the Mother stayed on till the eleventh day of the moon. She stayed in the southern portion of the garden house, north of the monastery. Along with her, there lived in that house Yogin-Ma, Golap-Ma, Lakshmi Devi, and Bhanu-pisi.

On the second day of the worship, more than three hundred devotees bowed down before the Mother, one by one. She was sitting on her cot facing west. As each devotee touched her feet, she blessed him. Four persons

1. According to Hindu belief, the gods and goddesses sleep for six months from summer solstice to winter solstice, waking up for six months on the latter day. As the Durga worship is celebrated in the first period, She has to be ceremonially awakened. This is done on the sixth day of the bright half of the lunar month. The actual worship takes place on the three succeeding days, and the image is immersed on the tenth day of the moon or the fourth day of the worship.

had their initiation on that day. The drama *Jana* was enacted that night, and on the night of the immersion ceremony was enacted the *Ramashwamedha*. The Mother witnessed both these performances from the upper storey of the monastery. After the third day's worship, Golap-Ma informed Swami Saradananda, 'Sarat, the Mother is highly pleased with your service and sends you her benediction.' The Swami, hardly knowing how to acknowledge that blessing, was deeply moved and exclaimed 'Indeed!'. And then looking meaningfully at Swami Premananda he added, 'Brother Baburam, did you hear?' The latter had heard it well enough; now in reply to Swami Saradananda's question he clasped him in a warm embrace.

On the tenth day of the moon, when the image was taken away on a boat for immersion in the Ganges, Dr. Kanjilal danced, gesticulated, and made faces at the image like a child, thereby evoking roars of laughter. But one of the Brahmacharis protested against these gestures and postures. The Mother was watching the whole scene from her own residence. When a monk drew her attention to the reaction of the puritanic Brahmachari, she said, 'No, no! All this is right. The goddess has to be entertained in every way through music, fun, and frolic.' The Mother returned to the 'Udbodhan' on October 22.

This was not either the first or the last visit of the Mother to the Belur Math during the Durga worship. She was there in Swami Vivekananda's time and also in 1916. With Belur she had a long association, and she had a love for the place. Many a time she had come there and stayed at the garden house of Nilambar Babu or at the rented house at Ghusuri; and all those places were sanctified by meditation and *japa*, religious discussion and practice, spiritual experiences and visions. In a reminiscent mood she said one day, 'Ah! How well I was at Belur! What a peaceful place it is! Meditation came naturally. And that is why Naren (Vivekananda) wanted to have a piece of land there.' It was not really Swami Vivekananda alone

who wished for a permanent residence there, the Mother's will also exerted its influence in bringing about that happy consummation. The monks were aware of this as also of the reality which had taken human form in the Mother, and hence they could not consider the worship of Durga a success unless She in Her human form came to the monastery to accept their adoration personally. At the commencement of the worship her name was ceremonially announced by the priest as the beneficiary of the celebration, and even to this day, that custom is being followed. The memories of the incidents connected with the Mother's presence at the Belur Math during those festivals are very inspiring to the monks and are treasured by them in their hearts. When the Mother came to the place of worship, the monks offered at her feet handfuls of flowers as they did at those of the Deity; and they did not consider their worship complete without such an offering. And during the celebration they kept their eyes fixed on her face; if she smiled, they thought that the goddess had accepted their worship. During one of these celebrations, Swami Brahmananda, the head of the monastery, worshipped her feet with one hundred and eight full-blown lotuses on the second day of the worship.

During the festival of 1916, the Mother came to Belur on the first day (*saptami*) of the worship, and lived in the garden house north of the monastery. Shortly after she had returned to her apartment after witnessing the worship, elders of the Math heard that as Radhu had fallen ill, the Mother would have to go back to Calcutta. Brahmachari Krishnalal who brought the message suggested to Swami Premananda to beg her to stay on. But the Swami replied, 'My boy, who dare dissuade the Great Mother! It shall be as She wills; we cannot do aught against Her wishes?' As a matter of fact, she did not go, for Radhu's condition improved, and the Mother gave up the thought of going. On the morning of the second day (*Ashtami*), she came to the courtyard of the monastery.

Nearby the inmates were dressing vegetables for the kitchen. At this the Mother remarked, 'The boys, I see, can dress vegetables well enough.' And Swami Jagadananda, who was also engaged in the work, said with a smile, 'Our object is to please the Great Mother, be that through spiritual practice or through dressing of vegetables.'

Some record of the worship that year has been preserved in a letter of Swami Shivananda, a portion of which we translate: 'Owing to the presence of the blessed Holy Mother, it has altogether been a direct worship (and not merely worship of the goddess in an image). Although there was continuous rain and storm on all the three days, yet by the Mother's grace, no part of the celebration suffered. And it even happened that just as the devotees sat for taking *prasada* the rain stopped. All were surprised at this. Afterwards it was learnt from Yogin-Ma that whenever the devotees sat for *prasada* and rain seemed to be imminent, the Mother sat down to make *japa* of Durga's name, and she prayed, "Dear me! How can so many people sit down to eat in this rain? Their leaf-plates and everything will certainly be washed away. Mother, save us!" And Mother Durga did indeed save. It happened likewise during all the three days.' After the Sandhi-puja (worship that is performed at the sacred moment of the junction of the eighth and ninth days of the moon) was over, Swami Saradananda said to a Brahmachari, 'Go and offer this guinea piece to the Mother and salute her.' The Brahmachari was not quite sure who was meant. He thought that the offering was to be made to the goddess. All the same he queried the Swami, who replied, 'Mother is there in that garden. Go and offer the guinea piece at her feet and salute her. It is she who has been worshipped here.'

For the convenience of the narrative we have skipped over the intermediate years to describe the two celebrations together. Let us now return to 1912. The Mother left

Calcutta a few weeks after the worship of Durga that year and arrived at Banaras on the 5th of November. After reaching the Ramakrishna Advaita Ashrama at Banaras at noon, she took a little rest and then went to Lakshminivasa, the newly built house of the Dattas of Baghbazar, Calcutta; and here she stayed for two and a half months. In expectation of the Mother's coming the owners had ceremonially opened the house only a few days earlier. The Mother stayed in the first floor with Golap-Ma, Bhanu-pisi, Kedarnath Datta's mother, and Master Mahashaya's wife and his sister-in-law; while Swami Prajnananda and other male devotees lived in the ground floor. The wide verandah of the house pleased the Mother and she remarked, 'We are indeed rather fortunate. A narrow place narrows down the mind, while a commodious place expands it.'

The very next day the Mother went to visit the Deities Vishwanatha and Annapurna in a palanquin. On the day following the worship of Kali (i.e., November 9), she visited the Ramakrishna Mission Home of Service, otherwise known as the Sevashrama, where Swamis Brahmananda, Shivananda and Turiyananda, Charu Babu (Swami Shobhananda), Dr. Kanjilal, and others were present. Kedar-baba (Swami Achalananda) accompanied her palanquin and showed her round. When she had seen every department, she sat down and in the course of a conversation with Kedar-baba expressed great delight at all the houses, gardens, etc., she had seen, and the good management she had noticed. She further added, 'The Master himself is present here and Mother Lakshmi (goddess of fortune) is here in all her majesty.' Then she wanted to know how the institution took shape and with whom the idea first originated. After hearing and seeing all about the institution she remarked, 'The place is so fine that I feel like staying on in Banaras.' Soon after she had reached her residence, somebody came with a ten-rupee note and handing it over to the head said, 'Kindly accept these ten

rupees as the Mother's donation to the Sevashrama.' That note is still treasured there as an invaluable asset.

That day a devotee asked the Mother at her residence, 'Mother, how did you find the Sevashramia?' She said calmly, 'I saw the Master himself present there, and that is why this work goes on here. These are all his work.' When this view of the Mother was communicated to Swami Brahmananda, he in his turn told it to Swami Shivananda. Just then Master Mahashaya was seen coming that way. His belief was that it was contrary to the Master's teachings to engage in that kind of social service without first realizing God through spiritual disciplines like *japa*, meditation, and austerity. Swami Brahmananda who knew his views, now set some devotees and Brahmacharis to ask him, 'Mother has said that the Sevashrama is the Master's work, and that the Master himself is present there. Now what do you say to that?' At Master Mahashaya's approach they crowded round him and put the question all in one voice, and the Swami too joined in. At this, Master Mahashaya smiled broadly and said, 'It can no longer be denied.'

Swami Brahmananda, in the course of his morning strolls visited the Lakshmi-nivasa and inquired about the Mother's health from Golap-Ma and sometimes made fun. One morning, as he came there, Master Mahashaya came out of his room and from the upper verandah Golap-Ma said, 'Rakhal, Mother asks you, why Sakti (Divine Energy conceived of as a woman) is worshipped first (before the male aspect)?'. Swami Brahmananda replied, 'It is because Mother has in her keeping the key to knowledge of Brahman. There is no other way unless Mother, out of compassion, unlocks the door with the key.' And he sang a song in the *baul* tune:

O mind, remain immersed in meditating the feet of Siva's wife;
Be immersed and avoid all misery.
All these three worlds are vain and in vain, you roam about.

Meditate within you the Coiled Energy that's of none but Brahman.

This is Kamalakanta's (poet's) message, 'Sing the glory of Mother Kali.

This indeed, is a stream of bliss; and paddle on slowly.'

As the song proceeded, he fell in the grip of a divine ecstasy and danced merrily; and at the end cried out, 'Ho, ho, ho!' and dashed out of the place. The Mother enjoyed this dance and afflatus from above, and below were Master Mahashaya and a few other devotees who also felt stirred to the depths by it all.

On the 28th of Agrahayana (December 14), she went out to visit the shrine of some of the gods and goddesses of Banaras. On another day when she came to the Tilabhandeshwara temples from the Vaidyanatha temple, she said of the Siva image at the former place that it was a natural one. Afterwards she went to the Kedarnath temple a little before dusk and attended the evening service after having a look at the holy Ganges. About Kedarnath she said, 'This Kedar and that (on the Himalayas) are the same — they are connected. If you see this one, you as well see the other. He is very much alive.'

She also visited the Sarnath ruins a few miles away. Miss MacLeod, who happened to be at a hotel in the cantonment area then, sent the hotel phaeton for her. But as it did not come in time, the Mother along with Radhu and Bhudev started away by a hackney carriage. When the phaeton came, Swami Brahmananda and some others proceeded by it to the same place. As the Mother was engaged in seeing the Buddhist ruins at Sarnath, she noticed some foreigners observing those things with evident astonishment, and she said, 'The people who constructed these things have come again; and struck with astonishment are remarking, "What wonderful things they made!"' At the time of returning, Swami Brahmananda had it communicated to the Mother that he wanted her to drive in the phaeton, while he himself would ride in the carriage.

But the Mother protested saying, 'No, no. Rakhal (Brahmananda) and others came in that one, and they will ride back in it. I shall be all right in this one.' But she complied at last and drove ahead in the phaeton, while Swami Brahmananda and his companions followed in the carriage. When the Mother was out of sight, the hackney carriage turned turtle while negotiating a bend. The Swami was not hurt much; recovering from the fall he said merrily, 'Luckily the Mother did not travel by this carriage.' The Mother on hearing of the incident said, 'That accident was really in store for me, but Rakhal perforce diverted it to his own shoulders. Otherwise, what, with those young ones in my carriage, might not have happened!'

The Mother visited two holy men this time at Banaras—one of them was a follower of Sri Nanak, and the other was Chameli Puri. The former was new to the place and was seated on the bank of the Ganges. The Mother offered a rupee at his feet and saluted him. The grand old monk Chameli Puri was asked by her companion Golap-Ma, 'Who arranges for your food?' And the Puri replied with faith and warmth, 'It is Mother Durga alone who does; who else does?' The monk's faith and deportment pleased the Mother immensely and on returning home she said, 'Ah! The old man's face comes to my mind—it is so very like that of a child!' Next day she sent him some oranges, sweets, and a blanket. When on a subsequent day there was a talk of her going out to see more holy men, she remarked, 'What more holy men have I to see! For there indeed I have seen a holy man! Who else can there be?'

She had visited Banaras twice before, but she could not remain long. She took advantage of this long stay to hear the *Kashi-Khanda*¹ and visited more temples. She was present one day at the Ramakrishna Advita Ashrama during the enactment of the *Rasa-lila*². As was the custom, she saluted the two boys who played the roles of Krishna

1. A mythological account of the glories of Banaras.

2. Boy Krishna's dance with the cowherd lasses of Vrindavan.

and Radha, by offering money at their feet. And she was followed in this by others. On another day, she sat there for two hours to hear the exposition of a portion of the *Bhagavata*. In addition Swami Girijananda went to her residence every afternoon to read to her the same book. On the 30th of December fell the birthday of the Mother, which was duly celebrated in her presence at the Advita Ashrama.

In the life of the Mother the two currents of spirituality and household affairs were so intermingled that for any new-comer it was difficult to separate the two or to comprehend their separate import. One day some local women visitors found the Holy Mother busy with Radhu and Bhudev, and in addition asking Golap-Ma to mend her cloth. Finding there only a repetition of their usual household scene, one of them could not help blurting out, 'Mother, I see, yōu are deeply engrossed in Maya.' 'What to do, my good girl,' answered the Mother, 'I am myself Maya.'¹ To be sure, the hint fell flat on the critic.

Another day, there came three or four women. The Mother was then seated on one side of the verandah, while Golap-Ma and others sat on the other side. As Golap-Ma appeared to be older and possessed of a more imposing personality, one of them saluted her and tried to enter into a conversation. Golap-Ma saw through the mistake and said, 'There sits the Holy Mother.' Not impressed by the simple appearance of the Mother, the woman thought that Golap-Ma was jesting with her; but when Golap-Ma repeated what she had said, the woman had to go to the Mother, who, however, was tempted to enjoy the fun and said with a smile, 'No, no, she indeed is the Holy Mother.' The woman was now in a fix — for both talked the same way, and there was no means of ascertaining the truth. So after some hesitation she decided to follow her first impulse and advanced towards Golap-Ma,

1. Maya may mean delusion, as also the Universal Mother who is its source. The latter is often called Mahamaya, the Great Maya.

who, however, rebuked her saying, 'Have you no judgment at all? Don't you notice whether it is a human or divine face? Does any human being appear like that?' The Mother had in reality something unique in her simple and yet placid look which revealed its supernormal character to any pure and discriminating mind. But how could that divine light be reflected on the dark and distracted minds which run after sordid worldly vanities?

The Mother left Banaras on the 2nd of Magha (January 16), 1913, and reached Calcutta the next day, where she remained for more than a month and then started for Jayrambati on the 11th of Phalguna (February 26), 1913.

IN A RURAL SETTING

After the opening of a railway station at Vishnupur, the Mother always travelled home via Vishnupur. At first she knew no one there and so she halted on the banks of either the Poka-bandh or the Lal-bandh, two of the big tanks there; and the cooking was done in some small wayside hut. Subsequently, when Swami Saradananda stayed there for two months in the second quarter of 1909, Sri Sureshwar Sen and his family became earnest followers of Sri Ramakrishna through contact with the Swami. From 1911 onward, the Mother usually rested for a while in their house, and sometimes stopped there for more than a day. The Master had once told her, 'My dear, Vishnupur is hidden Vrindaban; you must see it.' The Mother could not imagine at the time that Vishnupur would in due course become an important point on her way, and so she remonstrated, 'I am a woman; how can I see?' But the Master just said, 'No, my dear, you will see, you will.' Once, while passing through the town, the Mother visited the temple of the goddess Sarvamangala on the bank of the Lal-bandh, and she said, 'Verily! The Master's word has come true today.' Although Vishnupur has now lost its former importance, it still holds in its bosom the bright memories of its princes and unfolds before sympathetic visitor a bright chapter of Bengal's history in its old temples, and buildings, some of them in ruins now. The large tanks — Poka-bandh, Lal-bandh, and Krishna-bandh — strike one with wonder even in their present neglected state. The Mother used to enjoy her visits to Vishnupur.

In the middle of February 1913, the inmates of the Ashrama at Koalpara were informed that the Mother would shortly be visiting them. So, on the appointed day, the young inmates prepared to receive the Mother from a little beyond the borders of their place. As soon as the bullock-carts came into sight, one of the boys ran back to

the Ashrama to give those behind the happy news. Another boy walked with the Mother's cart and a little later he jumped up to the seat of the cartman and like an expert driver made the team of bullocks move very fast. The Mother was much amused at this and said smilingly, 'I see, you can drive the cart well enough, indeed. Well, it's good to learn all kinds of work.' The cart stopped at the Ashrama door, and the Mother was helped down by Kedar's mother; for, the prolonged sitting in the cart had made her rheumatic legs a little stiff. The devotees now saluted her one by one. Then she bathed in the Badujye-pukur and told the above-mentioned boy, 'You change your cloth for a bath towel and then pluck flowers and make arrangements for the worship.' The boy picked up the Mother's wet towel and went about his task. But Kedar's mother shouted to him, 'Hellow, my boy, why have you worn the Mother's towel? Change it, change it!' But the Mother said, 'What of that? What does it matter if a boy wears my towel. He is a boy: and boys are guileless.' And to the boy she said, 'Go and bring the flowers!'

When the flowers were brought, Kedar's mother selected the best of them for worship and the boy engaged himself in making sandal-paste for the worship, Brahmachari Kishori entered the kitchen, and Kedar carried on a conversation with the Mother. He said, 'Mother, all your sons are learned excepting a very few like us.' The Mother said tenderly, 'Fancy! The Master was not at all a learned man. The real thing is to have love for God. Methinks, many things will be accomplished on this side by you. What a lot these boys are doing for me. Why do you worry? The Master incarnated himself this time to save the rich, the poor, the learned, the ignorant, and all. I love you, you are my own boys.' After lunch she rested a little and then left that very day for Jayrambati in a palanquin.

As the rainy season of 1913 set in, malaria and dysentery spread widely in Jayrambati. In those days the

villagers got their mail twice a week from the post office at Anur, across the river Amodar, which at that time was in high flood, thus cutting off communication for a long time. The consequent absence of any news from the Mother caused deep anxiety in Swami Saradananda's mind, and he sent a messenger to her. He reported that the Mother was suffering from dysentery. A wire to that effect was sent from Kotulpur. As a result Dr. Kanjilal arrived with Sudhira Devi of the Nivedita School, and in a couple of days followed Yogin-Ma's sister Kali-dasi and Master Mahashaya's wife. Through their care and treatment the Mother came round in a few days. But, then, it became a problem for her to arrange for the comfort of so many guests from the city to whom a village during rains is most uninviting. The roads are then muddy, and vegetables and other fresh food-stuff difficult to procure. The Mother, therefore, told the Koalpara devotees very frankly that they alone could help her in this difficulty. The devotees responded cheerfully, and they not only supplied her with the necessary things, but also lent a hand in household duties. When the Mother was fully recovered, Dr. Kanjilal and Kali-dasi went back to Calcutta.

But owing to incessant work amid rain and sun, the Koalpara devotees fell ill with malaria. For about ten days the Mother did not hear from Koalpara and she feared that perhaps all the inmates had fallen ill. She knew too well the strict economy practised by the head of the Ashrama, and it made her all the more anxious. Therefore, she made inquiries through a woman and found that her apprehension was correct, the Ashrama inmates were all ill. Hence she sent a letter to Koalpara through the same woman again, which ran thus: 'Dear Kedar, I myself installed the Master there in the Ashrama. He liked parboiled rice, and ate nutritious food too. So I tell you, you will offer to the Master parboiled rice; and you shall not offer less than three curries, howsoever you may have to manage that. You cannot otherwise fight successfully with malaria.'

On the 13th of Ashwina (September 28), 1913, the Mother went to Calcutta, and the next year she wrote back to Kedar, 'If you can have a house erected for me at Koalpara, I can stay there now and then when I go to the village. The difficulties in my brothers' families are ever on the increase; and I can't always endure them. There is no place for me to which I can move in case of illness or in some similar contingency.' Stimulated by this proposal, the Ashrama inmates built for her a small house in the compound of Kedar's old paternal home. The Mother had now at her disposal a self-contained household with three contiguous bedrooms, a separate kitchen shed, and other necessary conveniences. This was later on called the Jagadamba-Ashrama or the Ashrama of the Divine Mother.

On the 6th of Vaishakha (April 20), 1915, the Mother started for Jayrambati from Calcutta. She was overjoyed to see the new house, but said, 'I shan't be able to stay this time; there are too many (Radhu and Maku and their husbands, etc.,) with me. I shall take them all to Jayrambati, leave them there, and then come with Radhu to pass here a few days.' Then she left for Jayrambati.

Three months later, a date was fixed for her going to Koalpara. It was in the middle of the wet season. On the appointed day, it began pouring from early morning. The first reaction of the Ashramites was that it would not be proper to bring the Mother there in such weather; but ultimately they decided that at least for the sake of keeping their word they should follow the plan, leaving the choice of coming or not coming to the Mother herself. As soon as they fought their way to Jayrambati with a palanquin, uncle Kali brawled out, 'The monkeys that you are! You pose as sister's devotees! Kedar has, forsooth, a pig's brain! How wonderfully did Yogen Maharaj (Swami Yogananda) serve my sister; with what care Sarat Maharaj (Swami Saradananda) does everything! How wonderful is their devotion! And how could you think of coming to take her in this rain?' The Mother heard every word and

smiled as she looked at the devotees. Encouraged by the Mother's kindly looks, one of the Koalpara devotees said, 'Do we, in fact, possess the competence to take the Mother or serve her? It was settled beforehand that we should come with the palanquin today, and that is why we are here.' 'You can keep your word,' joined in the Mother with a broad smile, 'and can't I mine? You take me now; Radhu and others will go later on when they may.' The Koalpara devotees then admitted defeat and said, 'How can that be? When none can come out of the house in this shower, should we get you drenched by taking you out and thus make you ill?' That put uncle Kail also in good humour. And in the darkness of the night the palanquin went back the way it had come.

Next month the Mother went to Koalpara with her nieces Nalini, Maku, and Radhu, and Radhu's mother. But she could not stay there in the new house for more than fifteen days, as she had left Jayrambati in the month of Bhadra (August-September) which is inauspicious for a long sojourn.

The time for the Jagad-dhatri worship (November) now drew near. The man who was to be in charge of the store for the celebrations fell ill; and hence the Mother asked a Koalpara boy to take up the work. But as he was not a brahmin, she cautioned him thus: 'It will be all right if you are only a little careful so as not to touch prohibited articles.' Social restrictions were very stringent then; even today they are harder than in towns. Sister Nivedita once said to Shyamasundari Devi, 'Granny, shall I go to your village, enter your kitchen, and cook there?' But Grandmother replied, 'Don't my good grand-daughter; they will excommunicate us if you enter our kitchen.' Once when the *prasada* of Jagad-dhatri was being distributed among the brahmins by uncle Kali, a monk unwittingly approached him and put a ceremonial mark on his forehead after the performance of the *homa* (sacrifice). This enraged the brahmin landlords who left the place at once for fear of

losing caste. They turned a deaf ear to the Mother's entreaty; on the contrary, they extracted a fine of twenty-five rupees. Subsequently, Sri Lalitmohan Chatterji came to the village with a gramophone to entertain the villagers. This was a new thing in rural parts and attracted a good gathering including the people who had earlier extracted the fine. Lalitmohan thought that to be a good opportunity for taking vengeance on those who had been so disrespectful to the Mother; and he threatened to shoot them unless the fine was paid back. Needless to say, the money was immediately repaid. For this and similar other exploits, Lalitmohan earned for himself the title of Kaiser among the devotees.

That was an ingenious little plan contrived personally by Lalitmohan. As for the Mother, she accepted all such restrictions in the field of social dealings; but amidst the devotees she tried to forget as much of them as possible. It was the family custom to worship Jagad-dhatri for three days instead of one; and on all days she went to the place of worship with her sisters-in-law to offer flowers at the feet of the goddess. On the night of the last day (Ekadasi), the monks sang in chorus the glory of the goddess. One of the songs pleased them very much and they repeated it more than once. It ran in part thus:

None need worry any more as to how one will see the Mother;
For, surely, She is not the mother of you or me, but of all in the
Universe.

The Mother heard it all. Then she said to the boy devotee of Koalpara, 'Ah! The song created a deep fervour. Of a truth, how can the devotees really have caste? Children are all equal. I wish I could have them all seated round the same plate for food. But there is this little difficulty; this benighted land brags of caste. Anyway, no prohibition attaches to fried-rice. You will do one thing tomorrow — you will go to Kamarpukur, and bring four

pounds of *jilapi*¹ from the shop of Satya, the sweetmeat seller.' The *jilapi* came next morning at about nine. The Mother offered the sweets to the Master; and then putting some fried-rice on a big plate, arranged the *jilapis* round the heap of fried-rice. This was sent to the devotees who sat round the plate and merrily partook of the food, while the Mother tenderly watched from an adjoining room.

By and by the villagers came to recognize the devotees as a class by themselves. One day, she sat on the porch in front of the main door of the house. Some boys were playing in the open space in front. When some unknown devotees passed by the boys, one of them asked his companion, 'Who are they?' The other boy answered with a pose of wisdom, 'Why, they are devotees, don't you know?' And when the first boy wanted to know their caste, the wise boy repeated, 'Why, don't you know? — they are disciples.' The Mother overheard them and said, 'Mark you! What comes out of children's mouths is often enough quite true. They have taken it for granted that the devotees form a caste!'

One incident at the beginning of 1916 is not only very funny, but is also illustrative of the Mother's fortitude in circumstances of danger. At that time, Gauri-Ma once went by way Koalpara to see the Mother at Jayrambati. From Koalpara she picked up Brahmachari Varada as a companion. As she rested by the Amodar an idea flashed into her mind. When she approached the Mother's door at nightfall, she tied a turban round her head like a man and advancing a little inside the compound of the house cried out like a beggar, 'Mother, may it please you to give me alms, mother!' The mad aunt came out of the verandh and demanded, 'Who is that?' Gauri-Ma again begged in a pitiable tone, 'May it please you to give me

1. Flour is mixed with water to make a thin paste, which is pushed through a small round hole in boiling oil or butter to form into crisp, spiral coils, which are then soaked in syrup.

alms, mother!’ Finding a man standing there at such an unusual hour¹, the mad aunt shrieked out, ‘O dear sister-in-law’, and she rushed to the Mother who walked out steadily and asked ‘Who is that?’. Gauri-Ma kept standing where she was and repeated, ‘May it please you to give me some alms, mother! I am a nocturnal beggar.’ Gauri-Ma’s voice revealed her identity to the Mother at once, and she said, ‘O, it’s you Gaur-dasi, come, come. When did you arrive?’ All of them then joined in a hearty laugh, whereas the mad aunt hid herself in shame in a room and did not stir out.

Whenever the Mother came to Jayrambati, she took up her abode in the house of uncle Prasanna. But now her retinue was big, the number of devotees was ever increasing, and her uncle’s family, too, was expanding. So the Mother’s further residence there became inconvenient from many points of view. So, another home was built for her on the western bank of Punya-pukur, at a total expenditure of about two thousand rupees. At the north-west corner of this homestead was a south-facing mud cottage for the Mother; south of this and facing west was a similar cottage to serve as a drawing-room or for the annual worship of Jagad-dhatri; opposite the Mother’s cottage was that of her niece Nalini and the women devotees; at the north-east corner was the kitchen; north of the last cottage, again, there was another cooking shed. The home was ceremonially opened on May 15, 1916. Along with the land purchased for this new home was bought the Punya-pukur, which after necessary excavation formed a part of the homestead. The Mother lived here for about four years.

The opening day of the house was marred by an unhappy incident. The devotees of Koalpara helped in every possible way in the building of the home and arranging for its opening. But they took so much to heart the insolence

1. Begging is done in the day-time, begging at night is almost non-existent.

of a few rich and honoured gentlemen who arrogated to themselves the leadership in connection with the opening celebrations that they decided not to be present on that day. The Mother did not fail to notice their absence and felt ill at ease. She inquired about them, but got no explanation from any quarter. When a couple of days later they turned up carrying some necessities for the Mother's household, she asked them about their absence from the opening ceremony. Nalini Devi told her why they did not attend. The Mother knew now the cause of their keeping aloof, and she was also told that when she would go to Calcutta this time, those influential devotees would take her by way of Garbeta and not by way of Koalpara. At all this the Mother remarked, 'What impostors these are! The Koalpara boys there have built a post and have been keeping watch on the way for me and my devoted children. What trouble do they not face for our sake? Those others lack the capacity, and yet how they offend by their heedless words! And shall I have to go with all my companions by way of Garbeta, crossing all sorts of rivers and canals, just because such a one prefers it so? The Koalpara boys are my mainstay. Whatever anyone may say, I shall have to pass ever and anon through Koalpara.' This warm and affectionate talk of the Mother melted the hearts of the devotees; they knew that the Mother was a real mother.

Swami Saradananda was at Vrindaban at the time of the opening of the new home. He returned to Calcutta after a month and a half and then proceeded to Jayrambati to bring the Mother with him. The Mother had decided that the new house and some paddy fields purchased by her for Jagad-dhatri would be formed into a trust in the name of the goddess and the deed would be registered at Koalpara through the sub-registrar of Kotulpur. By that deed she would make the Belur Math responsible for the maintenance of the property and the continuance of the worship of the deity. After a brief stay at Jayrambati,

Swami Saradananda went with the Mother to Koalpara on July 6, 1916, and the deed was registered the next day according to plan. The courtesy shown to the sub-registrar by the Swami on this occasion underlined his attitude of stewardship of the Mother. The sub-registrar was a young Mohammedan, well below thirty years of age; yet the old Swami offered him cigarettes and fanned him, as though he (the Swami) was a common man. At last when the registration was over and the gentleman was sent off in a palanquin, he felt relieved.

That very night the party left for Vishnupur by bullock-carts. They arrived there in the morning and spent the whole day at Sureshwar Babu's house, from where they left for Calcutta by the night train. The Mother stayed at the 'Udbodhan' for about seven months and then started for Jayrambati on January 31, 1917. On the way she spent a couple of days at Koalpara.

This year the Jagad-dhatri worship was celebrated in the Mother's new home, and in her presence. Soon after the Durga festival, she kept on counting the days for the commencement of the other festival and saying, 'So many days are left. My mother used to make such and such preparation at this time; with what care did she do it all! Can you guess how things will be managed?' Ten days before the celebration, on the afternoon of the Kali worship, she said, 'My mother used to begin twirling off the wicks from today,' and she started making the wicks for the lights. On the day of worship, she went to the goddess again and again with the end of her cloth placed round her neck in token of extreme humility, and there she prayed with folded hands for the safe accomplishment of the ceremony. The priest was a Bhattacharya from Haldi-pukur, and the *tantradharaka* was the family guru¹ of her brothers. At the end of the worship the Mother saluted the guru and placed the dust of his feet on her head. When she approached

1. Spiritual teachership was hereditary, and still continues to be so in many cases, though the custom seems to be dying out.

the priest with a similar purpose, he drew back and expostulated, 'Mother, how is it that you make obeisance to us? Do, please bless us.' The family guru seemed to have come to his senses now; but instead of showing any modesty he supported his pose of superiority by quoting a Sanskrit verse which means, 'I salute that blessed guru through whom has been revealed the Reality by which is pervaded this whole spherical universe of sentient and insentient things.' The Mother lent support by saying, 'That's true to be sure,' and left the place.

Next morning, Lalu, the fisherman of Satbere, came and said, 'Dear aunt, I shall sing some *baul* songs.' The Mother did not agree and pointed out various inconveniences; but Lalu assured her that he himself would get together the canopy, the lantern, and such other paraphernalia, for which none else need take any trouble. The Mother still pleaded, 'Lalu, why should you invite the ridicule of people? Much better will it be if you simply sit before the goddess and sing to her a few songs.' But Lalu stuck to his plan. In the evening he spread out the canopy, hung up the lantern, wore the long robe of the *bauls*, and faced the audience with a small drum dangling from his shoulder. And then he sang some humorous songs, made all roar with laughter, and left the place triumphantly.

The Mother's health deteriorated soon after; and in January 1918, her temperature rose very high. As soon as Swami Saradananda knew of this, he started with his brother, Dr. Satishchandra Chakravarty, Dr. Kanjilal, Yogin-Ma, Golap-Ma, Sarala Devi¹, and others and reached Jayrambati on January 21. The Mother said that she would take Kanjilal's medicine. That done, she recovered

1. As a little girl, she came to be known to Sister Nivedita and Sudhira Devi of the Nivedita School. At the age of nine or ten years, she met the Mother for the first time in her rented house on the Baghbazar Street; and from 1913 up to the passing away of the Mother she accompanied and served her at various periods and in diverse places as opportunity arose.

soon. But, perhaps, the greater result came from the presence of her beloved ones — the Swami and his companions. By getting them down to stay near herself and by being constantly engaged in thoughts of their comfort, she shook off the disease.

Some little trouble cropped up at Jayrambati at this time. To suppress all political activity in the country, the Government had arranged for a strict and elaborate police-vigilance. They watched the movements of all people, and came to the Mother's house to note down the names and whereabouts of all new-comers. Among the Mother's disciples could be counted some interneers; moreover, the frequent visits of East Bengal people raised the suspicion of the police all the more. In the police records the Mother's house was noted down as 'Mataji's (Mother's) Ashrama', which required close attention. The Koalpara Ashrama, too, shared a similar fate. This caused great anxiety to the Mother, and to remedy this Sri Bibhutibhushan Ghosh, a disciple of the Mother, brought to her house a superior police officer from the district headquarters to have personal acquaintance with the actual state of things. The officer was highly impressed by the courtesy and affection of the Mother, and when taking leave inquired whether she was afraid of the police. Bibhutibhushan tried to evade the question just to save the Mother from giving an unpleasant direct answer. But she said frankly, 'There is fear, to be sure, my son.' The police officer promised to ease the situation; and as a matter of fact, the police relaxed their surveillance after this visit. They now remained satisfied with noting down names and collecting general information, and the local sub-inspector of police held the Mother in great honour. When Swami Saradananda arrived at Jayrambati, the village watchman (*chaukidar*) came to note down the names of the whole party. And lest any negligence on their part should embarrass the Mother later on, Swami Saradananda saw to it that all information was scrupulously supplied.

The Swami had planned to take the Mother with him to Calcutta; but the Mother declined; and so he left Jayrambati leaving behind Sarala Devi for the Mother's service and another devotee to accompany the Mother to Calcutta in case she should change her mind. But when even after a fortnight there was no indication of such a change this devotee also took leave of her.

On the eve of the Sivaratri day (some time in late February) 1918, the village watchman Ambika came with the information that on the morrow the sub-inspector of the Shiromanipur police station would visit the Mother's house. Some time earlier Swami Jnanananda, who had been suffering from malaria, had gone to Katihar to Dr. Aghornath Ghosh's house to be treated by him. While staying there he got information of the Mother's illness at Jayrambati and visited her there. On his return to Katihar, the police falsely concluded that Swami Jnanananda was none other than a brother of Dr. Aghornath who had been absconding for political reasons and was now living incognito in the doctor's house under a monk's garb. And thus a silly but vigorous investigation was set in motion for ascertaining the antecedents of Jnanananda. Ambika said that the talks at the police station indicated that the sub-inspector's visit was only a part of that inquiry. That in itself was a simple affair; but nobody could be too sure of the whims of the all-powerful police of those dark days, particularly in the face of the Sindhubala incident which had happened in a nearby village some time back. But though the Mother's household was thus perturbed over the prospect of a visitation from the police, in the Mother's face could be seen absolute peace and assurance; and others, too, kept fairly calm for the being. At night also the Mother sat by her sons at meal-time, as usual, and she seemed totally unexcited.

Fortunately, Sri Manindranath Bose, a lawyer of Arambagh and a disciple of the Mother, came to see her the next day. The Mother was pleased to see him; and

her attendant told him everything concerning the forthcoming police inquiry. The sub-inspector came at sunset with his constables, and Manindranath entered into a conversation with him. In the meantime the Mother sent word from the inner apartment that she had arranged for a little refreshment for them. So Manindranath and the sub-inspector went in, saluted the Mother, and ate heartily what she placed before them. The police officer was overjoyed at the Mother's tender consideration for him and ended the investigation in a most friendly manner.

The Mother had not gone to Calcutta, but had stayed on at Jayrambati; and the Koalpara people pleaded that it would please them immensely and would do her health some good if she lived with them for some days. The Mother readily consented and went to stay there for about two months, returning to Jayrambati on the 15th of Vaishakha (April 30), 1918. According to the Mother's direction, Brahmachari Varada lived at Jayrambati during her absence. One noon, at about eleven, on reaching the Jagadamba-Ashrama (Mother's quarters at Koalpara) he found the place rather agitated. On inquiry he learnt that the Mother was in a state of spiritual ecstasy — she had lost consciousness while uttering 'Master'. When they sprinkled water on her face and eyes and she came to the normal plane, Nalini Devi asked her, 'Dear aunt, why was it so?' The Mother replied, 'Why, what did you see? That's nothing. My head reeled all of a sudden as I was passing the thread through the eye of the needle.' Long after, during her last illness at the 'Udbodhan', the Mother said to Varada with reference to this incident, 'I had come with a weak body from Jayrambati and was one day sitting on the verandah. A little away, Nalini and others were busy in some sort of sewing. The sun was high up — quite glaring. I saw, as though the Master entered by the main entrance, seated himself on the cool verandah, and at once lay down. At this sight I hurried to spread for him the end of my cloth when I felt a strange

sensation. Kedar's mother and others raised a hue and cry; and so I told them, then, that it was nothing.' The Mother had visions of the Master at Koalpara even after the incident narrated here; for during the same conversation with Varada, she added, 'I had such high temperature at Koalpara that I lay on my bed unconscious and unmindful of decorum. But whenever I came to my senses and called on him (the Master) for the sake of this body, I had his vision.'

Towards the end of her stay at Koalpara she had an attack of malaria with high temperature which rose to 103° at noon. This was too much for her weak and frail body to bear. When the fever rose, she felt a burning sensation on her palms and groped for something cool to lay them on. But as ice was not available, her hands were often placed on some one's cool bare body. During the height of the fever she inquired about Swami Saradananda who was then in Calcutta. As the fever did not abate, he was informed by wire to which he responded by sending Dr. Kanjilal with attendants for the Mother, and he himself followed them to Koalpara on April 17, with Dr. Satish Chakravarty and Yogin-Ma. The Swami went from the carriage straight to the Mother's bed-side and sat quietly near her head. The temperature was then going up, and the Mother seemed to be feeling for something. The Swami learnt on inquiry that she wanted something cool to lay her hands on. He removed his shirt at once and placed her hands on his cool bare body. The Mother getting relief thereby, said, 'Ah!' and looked up at the Swami, but contrary to her habit, she did not draw her veil, so that the people present concluded that she did not fully recognize the Swami owing to her semi-conscious state, for she was known for her shyness before him. The fever left the next day and she took solid food on April 21, when Dr. Kanjilal left.

The Mother gradually gathered strength; and, then, Swami Saradananda said one morning, 'Mother, we are

not going to leave you behind this time—we shall take you to Calcutta with us.’ The Mother did not object, but said, ‘But my son, I shall have to go to Jayrambati once to re-start on an auspicious day.’ So she went with others to Jayrambati on April 29. As the news of her return spread, the village women flocked there and said, ‘Mother, we had almost despaired of seeing you again. It gives us great joy to find you back here with all others.’ The Mother said, ‘Yes, mother. I suffered very much because of the disease. But then Sarat, Kanjilal, and others came up, and through the grace of Simhavahini, I am spared this time. Sarat asks me to go to Calcutta. If you all agree, I can go and come back after recouping a little.’ All heartily welcomed the proposal.

During the Mother’s illness at Koalpara, Radhu had, of her own accord, left all of a sudden for her husband’s home at Tajpur. The Mother now sent a messenger to ascertain whether she would go to Calcutta. Radhu declined the offer.

The Mother was to stay at Jayrambati for about a week. On the day before leaving the village, it began to rain heavily when the monks and Brahmacharis sat for their food, the Mother serving them. As the rain splashed on the verandah where they sat, Swami Saradananda drew together all the leaves to a safer place on the west and arranged for a joint lunch from a common heap. The junior Brahmacharis naturally felt somewhat ill at ease in eating jointly with such an august person as the Swami; but his insistence and the happy smile on the Mother’s face encouraged them.

On May 5, 1918, the Mother went to Koalpara and had a day’s rest there. On the morrow she left for Vishnupur in a carriage and reached Calcutta on the morning of May 7.

One of the saddest events in the Mother’s life during her stay at this time at the ‘Udbodhan’ was the passing away of Swami Premananda on July 30. Her eyes were

wet from the morning of that sorrowful day; and when in the afternoon came the stunning news of his departure, she wept bitterly and said, 'Baburam (Premananda) was so very near to my heart! All the energy, devotion, and wisdom of the Belur Math were impersonated in the form of my Baburam and walked there on the bank of the Ganges.' Recovering a little from the first shock, she laid her head at the feet of the Master's large picture in the middle room and cried out with a heart-rending wail, 'Master, so you have snatched him away!' At this scene none present could check his or her tears.

RADHU

Radhu's health and behaviour were quite good in her early years. Her childlike simplicity pleased everybody. She had no worry for the future and no attraction for money. To her the Mother was 'Mummy', and her own mother, 'Bald mummy', for the mad aunt had her hair cropped short. As the Holy Mother distributed her things rather liberally, Radhu's mother became jealous, and sometimes cantankerously rapped out, 'She is giving away everything; what will happen to Radhi in future?' And sometimes she harangued to her daughter, 'The sister-in-law is giving away everything to others; she is not laying by anything for you. Why do you stay on there? Come away to my room.' Radhu showed her annoyance at such advice gratis and scolded and motioned her 'Bald mummy' away. She needed little; for the Mother gave her plentifully. She loved those gifts, to be sure. But if others had a share of the Mother's bounty and clung to their presents, Radhu had no reason to be envious.

She was very good-natured indeed. But as ill luck would have it, she fell ill; and after her marriage, her temper degenerated in proportion as her health deteriorated. Noticing this the Mother once said to Kedar, 'What shall I tell you, my son? Formerly she was quite good. But nowadays she has become physically weak; and on top of everything she is married! Now I am afraid that she might ultimately turn mad as she is born of an insane mother. Have I after all brought up a lunatic?' In reality the Mother had to put up with not a little worry and suffering because of Radhu, although she had accepted her whole-heartedly at the bidding of the Master who indicated in a vision that Radhu was none other than Yoga-maya come down to provide a downward pull for the Mother's mind which would otherwise be lost

in lofty spiritual flight. Indeed, Radhu was fast tending to be a problem-girl and a source of worry and anxiety to the Mother. She became increasingly irascible and incoherent in talk. This becomes clear from some of the casual remarks of the Mother. When a woman devotee proposed to bring up a boy, the Mother drew her attention to her own condition owing to Radhu and said, 'Don't take up such a burden. Do your duty by every one; but love none but God. One has to suffer much if one loves.' On another occasion she said, 'Don't you see, how I suffer because of Radhu?' And with deeper regret the Mother said at the 'Udbodhan' one day, 'Do you notice, my daughter, how strange is this play of the Master? What a fine lot he has made of my mother's family. See what kind of company I have to keep. As for this one (Radhu's mother) she is rank mad; another (Nalini) is verging on insanity. And see there's another still (Radhu)! My daughter, what a strange being I brought up! She has not an iota of intelligence. She is standing there holding the railing—watching for her husband's return. She is afraid in her mind, lest he should get in where that music is going on. She is vigilant day and night. What an attachment, my daughter! I never knew that she would have so much attachment.'

Radhu really served two purposes in the Mother's life—on the one hand she acted like a bond binding her heart to this world, and on the other she supplied a background for the expression of her motherly qualities. (The greatness that manifested itself in the midst of the currents and cross-currents of this world could not otherwise have been easily comprehended. Greatness that is heightened by exceptionally favourable circumstances may evoke the comment from the householders,) 'We have nothing to learn from it; for we cannot hope to command such ideal conditions.' And, again, when the monks praise absolute detachment from worldly preoccupations, some wiseacres may laugh in their sleeves and say, 'These people know

nothing of the pleasures of this world, and yet conjure up a doleful picture of the world before their mind's eye to condemn it for no fault of its own.' The Holy Mother's life is full of meaning for either kind of critics. For she accepted the world *in toto* and played her game in it faultlessly. Her words are all soaked in life's experience; and yet every move she makes, sends forth bright rays of a light beyond.

In the second week of June 1918, Radhu had a boil on her finger; and she wanted to go to the Mother at Calcutta. The Mother, therefore, wrote to Kedar of Koalpara that Radhu would be proceeding to Calcutta with her mother and husband, and that if Radhu should so desire, Brahmachari Varada should be permitted to accompany the party. Radhu did, of course, want Varada; and he, too, travelled with them. When Radhu recovered, Varada escorted her mother back to Jayrambati. He had to proceed to Calcutta again in the beginning of winter when Radhu's mother wanted to see her daughter who was ailing there.

On December 31, 1918, Swami Shivananda announced at the Belur Math that Swami Saradananda had sent word about the Holy Mother's coming to the Math with Radhu that very afternoon, and that she would live in the adjoining northern garden house, which should accordingly be tidied up. Radhu was in the family way, and her nerves had become so sensitive that she could not bear any sound. The Mother had chosen that quiet house with the idea that it would soothe Radhu's nerves. But that very day further news came that Radhu would not be coming; for she had calculated that the Belur Math would really be a noisy place for several reasons: just on the border of the garden house was located the Math chapel where during worship they would ring bells. In the evening they would sing hymns to the accompaniment of musical instruments; in front there was the Ganges over which plied a number of steamers which have their screaming sirens; and near

at hand was the birthday celebration of Swami Vivekananda, which was bound to attract a large number of devotees. The Mother had, therefore, to go to a comparatively quieter place in the city—the boarding house of the Nivedita Girls' School! The very next morning Swami Shivananda sent Brahmachari Varada to inquire about the Mother's comforts. Finding him, the Mother said dismally, 'Here I am at last in this sea of trouble. I don't know, Varada, what is in store. And yet wait and see how long after all she continues here. Radhu is in bed all the time; her heart can bear no sound. I don't know, my boy, what disease it is! The Master alone knows how she will be saved.'

After a few days the Mother said, 'Can you imagine? Radhu doesn't like even this place any longer. She says, "Let's go to the country." But you know her condition well enough. Is there any good doctor or Kaviraj to be had in the country? What a lot of advantages we have here. But she will always have her own way. Let us wait and see how things shape themselves.' On the birthday of Swami Vivekananda it was rumoured at the Belur Math that the Mother would be going to her village home the next day. Varada was duly sent for; he would have to accompany the Mother. When the Brahmachari reached the 'Udbodhan', he found the Mother busy packing up. At the sight of Varada, she said gloomily, 'I am going to the country to drift in this unfathomable sea (meaning Radhu). You all will be my mainstay there. Sort out these articles properly, pack and bind them up securely. Nothing has been arranged so far. I was waiting for you till now.' When Varada got down late at night after finishing the packing, Swami Saradananda told him, 'It's my wish that you should stay with the Mother as long as she needs you.' Varada readily agreed, and continued to be at her service till the last day of her life.

Next morning the Mother started by train for Vishnupur with Radhu and Radhu's mother, Nalini Devi and

Maku, the widow (Mandakini Roy) of Navasan¹, and others. Two monks escorted them up to Vishnupur, where they lodged at the house of Sri Sureshwar Sen. Next morning at tea-time, Sureshwar brought a young man of about twenty-six or twenty-seven years of age and introduced him saying, 'This is a good astrologer who has his home here. In Calcutta he studies under and lives with a teacher who is a noted astrologer.' This aroused everybody's interest, and each wanted the marks on his or her palm to be interpreted. Reading Radhu's palm the astrologer predicted, 'She won't have an easy delivery.' And studying Maku's palm he foretold, 'Several successive children of hers will not meet each other.' At this Maku hustled to the Mother and began to cry. The Mother consoled her in many ways and then calling the astrologer to herself told him, 'My boy, you are still young. If you had noticed such a portent, it would have been much better to have told us of it apart. Be that as it may, you now tell me of some remedy that you may have in your astrology. If I don't do any such thing how can I pacify Maku? And then let the Lord's will be done.' The astrologer said, 'According to us, she should now either read the *Chandi* or hear it read for three consecutive Tuesdays; and then there should be a *homa* and other auspicious rites.' Maku's son Neda was then two and a half years old, and he was very healthy, intelligent, and lovable. And Maku expected another child in a couple of months. So the prophecy of the astrologer had a very depressing effect on everybody.

Early in the morning on January 29, 1919, the party left in six bullock-carts and after reaching Jaypur at a distance of eight miles halted for cooking for the noon.

1. She was married in a Kayastha family of Navasan, a village within the Goghat police station of the Hooghly district and only a few miles away from Kamarpukur and Jayrambati. She had no issue and her husband died early. She became a disciple and then an attendant of the Mother. In the Mother's household she was known as the daughter-in-law of Navasan. For convenience we refer to her as 'the widow.'

The rice was being boiled in an earthen pot. When it was ready and the cook wanted to take it down for removing the gruel, the vessel burst and fell down. This created a real problem, for such food could not be offered to the Master, and cooking again would mean great delay. But the Mother remained undisturbed. She carefully removed the rice from the top of the scattered heap to some leaves and adroitly separated the gruel from it. Then she washed her hands and brought out the picture of the Master from her box. Along with the rice she served some curry and lentil soup for the Master and said with folded hands, 'This is how you have ordained it today. Now take some warm food without delay.' The Mother's talk and movements set all laughing; but nothing perturbed, she said calmly, 'I have to adjust according to time and circumstances. Come now, do you all sit down for food.' The carts restarted as soon as all had finished taking their food. But they could not reach Koalpara before eleven o'clock in the night.

According to a previous plan, the Mother was to remain at Koalpara for a day or two; but the solitude of the village brought sound sleep to Radhu, and she insisted on continuing there. And in consultation with uncle Kali and others, the Mother also concluded that all things taken together, Koalpara was preferable to Jayrambati. Accordingly, from that time till the 7th of Shravana (July 22), 1919, the Mother stayed on at the Jagadamba-Ashrama at Koalpara. For the reader's help we should add here a few words about the locality.

The Ashrama at Koalpara stands on the main road from Kotulpur to Desra on way to Jayrambati. The Jagadamba-Ashrama, where the Mother lived, was at the farthest end of the village, and about a furlong east of the monastery. This homestead was in a solitary place and was surrounded by high walls. The cottage meant for the Mother was spacious and had a cemented floor. Near it was the kitchen. A big cottage at the south-east corner

could accommodate seven or eight women devotees. And another cottage at the south-west corner served as a waiting room for the men devotees who came to see the Mother in the day-time. On the inner verandah of this cottage was a husking machine. South of this group of cottages, at a distance of about fifty yards, was Kedar's dwelling house. Before the Jagadamba-Ashrama was built, the Mother used to reside here when passing through Koalpara. These latter precincts had a big cottage facing east; east of that was the small family chapel of Kedar. On the north was a cowshed; and the whole place was surrounded by a wall, outside which, on the east and south, were thick bushes of thorny plants; on the west was a small pond, and on the north some quince and tamarind trees. It was a somewhat isolated homestead. Even so, Radhu selected this dreary place for her residence.

Many monks and devotees came to Koalpara as they found the Mother more easily accessible here than in Calcutta. All the men had their food at the main Ashrama, while the women had theirs at the Jagadamba-Ashrama. The total number of inmates at both the places often rose to as high as forty.

After spending there just a few days, the Mother said to Brahmachari Varada, 'Something has happened to me lately—whatever thought arises in my mind comes true, be it good or bad. Radhu has taken a fancy to this wild jungle, for it is quiet. But it strikes me that though you may have to go out on business throughout the day-time, you should remain here with me from evening and have your food here. I am rather nervous here, my boy! I have told (Brahmachari) Rajen, too; he will be able to come at about ten or eleven after finishing his work at the Ashrama.' From that day on, Varada returned every evening and sat on a cot under the quince in front of Radhu's cottage. The Mother, too, came and talked in a low tone; for Radhu then lay in her bed and could not bear to hear any sound whatever. The slightest noise set her heart beating

fast. And hence all metallic things—the handles of buckets, door chains, etc.,—had cotton wrappings round them. One day the Mother said, ‘Look here, how thick this jungle is! I shouldn’t wonder if someday a bear should make its appearance here.’ Varada assured her that that part of the country was free from bears. Yet the Mother added, ‘Who knows, my boy? How dark it is here! I am afraid.’ In a day or two, it was actually reported that in the field of Desra, only a mile away, a huge bear had appeared and mauled to death an old woman as she was picking up cowdung, and that the beast, too, had been shot dead. In the evening the Mother said, ‘So you see what a horrible thing the bear has done today! They say that it has killed the mother-in-law of Ambika (the village watchman). Yet did you not assert that there were no bears in these parts?’

As suggested by the astrologer of Vishnupur, many auspicious rites were gone through for a whole week for warding off the evil portent from Maku. And then in the evening the Mother sat under the quince and said, ‘What a lot of difficulties I had to live in at the Nahabat for the service of the Master; and yet there was no consciousness of any inconvenience, the day passed off merrily without any notice. And here I am now in all sorts of trouble because of these people. The rites for Maku’s solace are over today. I am sitting here with you in the jungle to the detriment of all my religious practices, *japa*, and penances. And now I should thank my lot if, through God’s grace, nothing untoward happens to Radhu.’ As the talk went on, the widow of Navasan came up and said, ‘O brother, did you hear? At noon today, I was sitting here on the verandah with the Mother; all was quiet. The Mother said, “Those two crows used to come here till a few days ago to perch on yonder tree and caw. This irritated Radhu. But, well, for some days now they haven’t been seen.” Hardly had the Mother finished than the crows came and cawed from the tree.’ The Mother smiled and corroborated the story saying ‘Yes, my boy.’

In the middle of June 1919, it had rained heavily for some days, when one night, at about ten o'clock, they sat under the tree. The Mother said all of a sudden, 'Look here, that lunatic of Shihar has not been coming here for a long time. He is stark mad. But he is good at singing, for instance. But I am afraid, my boy, lest he should begin shouting.' The widow of Navasan protested, 'Why, again, do you mention him, Mother? Suppose he pops out at this dead of night!' The Mother replied, 'Who knows, my daughter! And what an apprehension you have! How can he come crossing the river in this rainy season?' Before silence had dropped over her words, the lunatic made his appearance with a bundle of vegetables under his arm and a large hat of palm leaves on his head. He said to the Mother, 'Here I am with some vegetables for you.' The widow of Navasan ran to a room and bolted the door. The Mother said softly, 'Go away, don't you make any noise at this late hour of the night.' He replied, 'How can I go now? The river is in flood!' 'Then how did you come?' queried Varada. 'I crossed by swimming,' replied the man. The Mother again said in a very persuasive and sweet voice, 'My good man, don't you create any disturbance.' The man at once left the place calmly and slowly. After this event the Holy Mother had a fairly quiet time there.

Radhu's disease, however, showed no sign of improvement, rather it worsened day by day. Sympathetic people were not wanting, each of whom had a remedy to prescribe. The Mother politely listened to them all, and in all possible cases acted up to those suggestions, for she did not want to offend anybody if that could be helped. In the beginning of March 1919, Nalini Devi said, 'Mind you, aunt, when Radhu's mother became mad, it was you who made her wear the bangle of the "Mad Kali" of Tirol; and only then did she come round. I think, Radhu also will fully recover if she wears the bangle. She also has got a touch of insanity; otherwise how could she be sleeping all the

time like that, though she is quite normal so far as food and such things are concerned.' Accordingly, the Mother sent some one to Tirol, seventeen miles away, to bring the bangle after offering due worship to Kali there. As the bangle arrived at night, it was kept hanging on a tree, for it was not to touch the ground. Next morning Radhu wore it; but there was no result, except that Radhu's mother became all the more quarrelsome and went on abusing Nalini Devi without rime or reason. After a few days, the mad aunt told the Mother, 'Why did you bring Radhu here from Calcutta? It would have been far better in Calcutta. Here it is hot; and Radhu would recover if ice could be applied.' To pacify the aunt, the Mother had ice brought from Vishnupur. As this was being applied to Radhu's head, uncle Kali turned up and said, 'Sister, what a pity that you consented to apply ice on the advice of that mad woman to an enceinte's head! God be thanked, if the cold does not produce something worse. Sister, you don't understand; it's no disease at all, for otherwise the big doctors of Calcutta would not have failed. She is perhaps possessed by some god or ghost. At Sushnegede there is a Chandali¹ who is an adept in the *tantrika*² cult. Why should we not get him to try his skill on her?' The ice pack was then given up, and uncle Kali was asked to bring the *tantrika* adept. As the uncle and Varada reached the man's place, he scattered some mustard seeds over their bodies and declared solemnly, 'Yes, I have understood it all; I have got the command, I shall have to go there in a day or two.'

As the *tantrika* arrived the following afternoon, the Mother saluted him with the greatest humility and described Radhu's condition with tearful eyes in a way as though the *tantrika* alone could save her from the insur-

1. A man of a very low caste.

2. Tantras are scriptures associated in popular belief with occult practices which are supposed to bestow supernormal powers to their followers, the *tantrikas*.

mountable difficulty in which she was placed. The man was satisfied on examination of the patient that it was a genuine case of supernatural influence. But the remedy that he prescribed was altogether beyond the competence of anyone to procure. The oil and liver of a *rohita* fish (*cyprinus rohita*, carp) weighing more than forty pounds were to be boiled in the oil extracted from black gingili seeds by grinding them in a village oil-press; and with these were to be cooked iron, various scented articles, the dung of a bull, and such other ingredients to be picked up from various inaccessible places. The resulting ointment had to be rubbed on Radhu's body, and she had to wear an amulet. The Mother evinced the greatest interest at first; but when it became clear that it was a wholly absurd prescription, she became despondent and said, 'There's no gainsaying that I am reverential to all the deities and am craving their favour; but none is kindly disposed. It'll be as the Lord wills, as it is written on Radhu's forehead (by the fingers of Destiny)! Master, you are the only saviour!' This mood of absolute dependence on Providence renders the Mother extraordinarily attractive.

On the advice of some well-wishers, the Mother also agreed to invoke the help of a *Chanda* (a fierce spirit) through adequate rites. In an abandoned shed outside the Ashrama, the *Chanda* was duly summoned by charms, worship, and sacrifice. In the consequent seance the spirit prescribed many queer medicines and gave directions for procuring an oil from the demonologist's house. Everything was done. But Radhu's ailment defied all these attempts at treatment.

Out of a sense of duty and for the solace of all the Mother had many such things done. And yet her faith in Providence never wavered, and her detachment never flickered. One day, when somebody proposed that for Radhu's safe delivery a certain doctor should be called in, she revealed her real mind by saying, 'Aren't the bitches and vixens of the forests delivered of their litter?'

In the middle of May 1919, news reached Koalpara that the mother of the widow of Navasan lay ill at home without any hope of recovery and without anybody to nurse her. The Mother had her brought to Koalpara and sent for doctor Prabhakar Mukherji of Arambagh, a disciple of hers. The doctor came; but the old woman did not live for long. She breathed her last a few days later.

In the meantime two events had happened: the first was the death of Maku's son Neda on April 20, 1919. This boy of extraordinary qualities was a pet of the Mother, and the blow caused extreme grief. The second event was Radhu's giving birth to a child without any accident. Her protracted neurasthenia had led doctors to opine that an operation might be necessary at the time of delivery; and hence at the bidding of Swami Saradananda, Dr. Vaikuntha (afterwards Swami Maheshwarananda) and Sarala Devi proceeded to Koalpara. But everyone was surprised to see Radhu give birth to a son on the 24th of Vaishakha (May 9), without much trouble. Radhu, however, continued ailing even after this, and her nervous troubles was somewhat aggravated. Neda's death followed by this set-back in Radhu's condition completely overwhelmed the Mother; she wept as she talked of these things. After the death of the mother of the widow of Navasan, Dr. Mukheri came to take leave of the Mother and said with folded hands, 'Mother, the world is full of sorrows. There's no escape since I am already in it! Mother, how can we get peace? The world is quite galling to me!' The Mother said very sympathetically and with tears in her eyes, 'True enough, my son, there's no joy in the world. The Master is our only refuge. But, my son, it is a great sin to lead a worldly life or to live with one's relatives. I committed a blunder by getting Radhu married and now I am suffering.'

The Mother had at first fixed the 4th of Shravana (July 19), 1919, as the date for going to Jayrambati. But as it rained heavily, she went there only on the seventh of

Shravana. For some seven or eight months following child-birth, Radhu remained so weak that she could not stand up or walk. She simply crawled along; and she did not wear any clothes, so that her dwelling place had to be screened off with cloth. At times she became so intractable that she had to be forcibly carried to her bed. Some thought that it was all sheer madness; while others believed it to be real weakness. And to crown it all, she had become addicted to opium and pestered the Mother for increasing the dose. The Mother tried all the while to cure her of this by stages; but Radhu would not agree. Recently the Mother had been in poor health, and to add to her suffering there were all these additional troubles. One day the Mother was dressing vegetables, when Radhu approached her. The Mother knew her motive and, therefore, argued with her, 'Radhi, why do you continue thus? Stand up straight now; I am fed up with you. I am going to lose my religious practices, duties, money, and all for your sake. Can you tell me from where to meet all these expenses?' Radhu became furious at this and taking up a big egg-fruit from the basket in front, struck at the Mother's back with all her might. As it fell with a thud, the Mother bent her back in pain and the place became red and swollen. But unmindful of this, she turned to the Master and prayed with folded hands, 'Master, don't be offended at her; she is ignorant.' Then taking the dust of her own feet in hand, she rubbed it over Radhu's head and said, 'Radhi, the Master never uttered a harsh word against this body, and you inflict such pain on it! How can you evaluate my worth? How lightly do you mean to deal with me just because I have chosen to live amidst you all?' Radhu then began to weep. And the Mother continued, 'Radhi, if I become offended, then you can find no shelter anywhere in the three worlds. Master, don't be offended with her.'

Sometimes before Radhu's son was born, a strange transformation had been creeping over her demeanour;

and just then the Mother was getting ready for her final departure — there were only two and a half years left for the concluding of that divine drama. The devotees had heard that the day when the Mother's heart would be detached from Radhu, there would remain no means to arrest its natural gravitation towards the state beyond all worldly encumbrances. Then the curtain would drop on her playing her part as a human being. Now through the wishes of Sri Ramakrishna, those affectionate cords which tied her to this world seemed to be snapping one by one.

The Mother's mind had been getting detached from Radhu for the last few years. Even in her early age Radhu had contracted diseases, and there was no end to her malady. In addition, her temper worsened day by day. At this the Holy Mother remarked, as early as the middle of May 1913, 'I have no attachment to this Radhi. Coming in constant touch with diseases my mind has developed a dislike, but I keep it there by force, and say, "Master, let my mind be a little attached to Radhi, otherwise who will take care of her?"' I never have seen such morbidity. She must have died of some disease in a previous birth before she could undertake any expiatory rites!' Although the Mother tried to keep her mind in this world, the mind refused to be pinned down. As an ostensible reason for this the devotees came to know, only of Radhu's diseased mind and body. The Mother had given her a good training, but Radhu's mental make-up was not high enough to be benefited thereby. The Mother's affection did not soften her, but made her all the more petulant and impudent. And her mother's insanity, too, penetrated somewhat into her character, thereby making her conduct towards the Mother repugnant to others. At last she came to disrespect, abuse, and beat the Holy Mother. Staggered at this development in her behaviour, the Holy Mother once said, 'Radhi, though you have been fed with the milk of a lioness, you continue to be the vixen that you are. What

pains have I not taken to make you a worthy person, but you have imbibed nothing of my goodness; you have taken wholly after your mother.' Radhu became enraged at this and drew the veil over her face. Amused at this the Mother remarked, 'You can't do without me, and yet you draw the veil at the sight of my face!'

The matter did not stop here. Once the Mother was going by bullock-cart from Vishnupur to Jayrambati. When the cart was approaching Kotulpur, Radhu, who was also in it, went on pushing the Mother with her feet and saying, 'Off with you, get away; get you down from this cart.' The Mother moved away from her to the farthest limit as she kept on saying, 'If I go, then who will do all these penances for you?' Another day, as Radhu kicked her, she took the dust of her feet and placed it on Radhu's head saying, 'What have you done Radhi, what have you done?'

Radhu's oppression of the Mother increased apace, and the Holy Mother by degrees, withdrew her thoughts from her. Now who can say which of these was the earlier? It rather strikes us that by divine dispensation the basic fact of disentanglement antecedent to final dissociation from life was taking shape simultaneously at both ends. At the time of leaving for Calcutta at the beginning of May 1918, the Mother wanted to see Radhu and had her brought from her father-in-law's house. As soon as she got down from the palanquin, the Mother greeted her warmly saying, 'Come, my daughter, Radhu', and pressed her to her bosom. But she was now aware that Radhu's individuality was fully developed; she had wilfully gone to her husband at Tajpur leaving behind the Holy Mother in her sick-bed at Koalpara, and later when the Mother had inquired if she would go to Calcutta, she had declined. The Mother took due account of Radhu's wishes and arranged for sending her back to her husband. At the time of parting Radhu wept bitterly and saluted the Mother by falling down at her feet; but the Mother remained totally

unmoved, though she blessed her cheerfully, and bade farewell to her quietly as she would have done to anyone else. A by-stander, not knowing them personally, could not believe that they were really Radhu and the Mother!

We now come to the beginning of April 1920. Radhu was then at Calcutta with the Mother, and her son was also there. Regretfully the Mother said, 'I have lost all for Radhu, my health, my spiritual exercises, money, indeed everything. And she is almost on the point of killing her son. He has somehow been saved on being handed over to Sarala after his coming here. And Kanjilal is treating him. As for Kanjilal he has declared already, "I shan't be able to treat the boy if he is in Radhu's keeping." I don't know what's there in the Master's mind; what's the meaning of giving her a son when she doesn't know so much as how to take care of her own person? And furthermore, she has developed a disease again. What's all this come to, my daughter? Whatever that may be, I am fed up with them. How outrageous was their conduct at home! Did they care for me at all?'

It is the Bengali New Year's day, in the middle of April 1920. The evening service at the 'Udbodhan' is over. It is not yet time to feed Radhu's son; some one has gone to call Sarala Devi for the purpose. But the child is crying; hence Radhu insists on feeding him forthwith. As the Mother forbids her, she flares up and curses the Mother, 'May you die, may your mouth be on (funeral) fire,' and so on. The Mother has been fighting for a long time with disease and truculence; and now she is a bed-ridden patient when her life is ebbing away and patience has reached its last limit. She can bear it no longer; and with the greatest pain mixed with the highest affection she says, 'Yes, you will know what straits you will be reduced to once I am gone.¹ Today, on this New Year's day, I wish it

1. Nine months after the Mother's departure, Radhu's husband Manmatha married a second time and deprived of the love of her husband Radhu took her abode at Jayrambati. Manmatha's economic condition deteriorated at

so truly that you may die first and then I pass away in comfort.' Radhu could, however, hardly recognize the hidden touch of love, she could only see the indifference on the surface. With mortification the Mother said at last to a devotee, 'Fan me, my daughter, oppression from her burns me to the very bone.'

The Mother continued on this earth only for three months after this.

MISTRESS OF THE HOME

As the reader came to the end of the previous chapter, he must have heaved a deep sigh and said with the Bengali poet, 'You descended on earth for the good of people, and yet what tribulation had you to undergo!' We are constrained nevertheless to present in this chapter yet another doleful tale. And while on this task, we have to remember that we shall miss the import of the lives of those who descended for the betterment of this world in this age, if we study them merely against the background of the past. For in these lives there is not only to be seen the highest detachment, but also the most earnest desire to do good. In these lives the moral qualities like forbearance and kindness which are associated with saints were not practised in caves or secluded places but in the din and bustle of towns. Sri Ramakrishna, who was renunciation incarnate, never shunned his duty towards his mother, shed profuse tears at the death of his nephew Akshay, accepted his wife when she came to him and trained her up to carry on his message after him, and spent his whole life in the service of needy souls. Swami Vivekananda shed the last drop of his blood for the service of his own mother, motherland, and the God in men. The Mother's mind was never attached to the world in the ordinary sense of the term; and yet the actions and reactions of domestic contacts produced in her life such motherly love, patience, compassion, and endurance as were unparalleled; and because of this rare combination their bearing either on present-day or future society is not easy to assess, though even to us of the modern age there should be no doubt as to their far-reaching influence on ages to come. Hence it is useless to spend our time in discovering any meaning; it is much better to proceed with the life-history as we find it.

Revered Yogin-Ma had once this doubt in her mind: 'I have seen the Master as a man of extreme renunciation;

but I find the Mother so worldly-minded! Day and night she is occupied with her brothers, nephews, and nieces.' Then, one day, as she sat in *japa* on the bank of the Ganges, she had a vision in which the Master appeared to her and said, 'See, see, what is floating down the Ganges.' Yogin-Ma saw a newly born babe, red with blood and wound round in its navel string, being carried away by the current. The Master commented, 'Can the Ganges be polluted at any time? Think of her (the Mother) also in that way. Don't entertain these doubts. Know her and this (pointing to his own body) as identical.'

In studying the domestic life of the Mother, the first thing that strikes us is her non-attachment. She does her duties, to be sure; nay, it appears at times as if she was as much affected by the sorrows of the world as any other person; but the next moment an innate serenity that defies all vicissitudes emerges brilliantly like the moon freed from a passing cloud.

At the end of December 1918, the Mother sat on the porch near the main entrance of her house, while the monks sat on the verandah of the parlour. In front moved the loads of paddy towards the farm-yard of uncles Varada and Kali. The fencing put up by the latter outside his threshing floor had encroached a little on the road, so that the paddy bags coming to uncle Varada's barn could not pass through easily. This gave rise to an altercation between the two brothers, and a scuffle was about to ensue when the Mother, no longer able to sit indifferently, rushed to the place and, to pacify them, sometimes said to the one, 'It's your fault', and sometimes dragged the other by the hand. She was much older than either of the brothers, who had, in fact, been brought up by her. Hence they could not ignore their sister altogether; her intervention stopped them from coming to blows. Nevertheless, she could not stop them from exchanging hot words. She, however, kept standing between them. Just then the monks came to her rescue, and the brothers walked away cursing

each other. The Mother was excited, no doubt; and in a flurry she returned and sat down on the verandah of her house. And then in the twinkling of an eye her anger and agitation were nowhere; on the contrary, the eternal peace behind all clashes of worldly interest on this stage of life's drama revealed itself before her eyes to evoke a hearty laugh; and she said, 'What a maya (magic) is this of the Mahamaya (Conjuror). There stretches the infinite earth, and these possessions, too, will be left behind. Can't man understand this simple fact?' And she burst into a fit of laughter that lasted pretty long.

At noon on the last day of the month of Paush (about January 15), the Mother made her sons sit for eating cakes on the verandah of uncle Prasanna, while she herself sat by them to see that they were properly served. Nearby the mad aunt and Nalini Devi kept busy arranging things to be sent as gifts on that happy day to the houses of the fathers-in-law of Radhu and Maku respectively. Now and then they came to the Mother to consult her and apprise her of the articles being sent. The gifts were being drawn from her store and at her cost. And yet she did not seem to evince any interest; but in an absent-minded way answered 'yes' or 'no' to their eager questions. This indifference told on the nerves of both the aunt and Nalini Devi. First they mumbled and then began complaining openly. The Mother, too, then said, 'See, I have so many sons; when they come, one can serve them with food on hands or on leaves as one wills; and they eat with joy. But should one of theirs come, what a number of cups and dishes one will have to bring out! And if you don't, there will be bitter complaints!' When the devotees finished eating, the Mother got up and gave betels to them, but she did not send any presents to her sons-in-law's houses, and from her mood it was evident that this decision was deliberate.

The astrologer of Vishnupur had prophesied that some successive issues of Maku would not meet each other. Some

seven or eight days before the birth of her second son, her first son Neda died at Jayrambati at five-thirty in the afternoon of April 20, 1919, after suffering from diphtheria for three days. The news was carried by Dr. Vaikuntha Maharaj to the Holy Mother at Koalpara. At this she was beside herself with grief and cried as bitterly as any ordinary woman would. Not much later the time for offering food to the Master approached, and yet the Mother remained disconsolate. As a matter of duty, therefore, a devotee reminded her of the Master's worship. At once she was a changed person, as though nothing had happened. She offered the food duly. She did not cry for the whole night, though she talked about Neda and that with the greatest sorrow.

To feed and provide amply for the near and dear ones is a normal obligation of every householder; and society makes allowances for it though to cynics and pessimists such behaviour may appear as nothing better than sublimated selfishness. A man established in the knowledge of Brahman is equally cognizant of the illogicality of the situation. But unlike the cynic, he does not utter a single word of condemnation; on the contrary, he sympathizes with the householder in his struggle for the removal of a felt want, and he is ever ready to help him in his effort so far as it lies in his power. Such instances can be found in abundance in the life of the Mother.

Radhu was then ill at Koalpara. Uncle Kali and Brahmachari Varada were returning from their visit to the *tantrika* of Sushnegede to whom they had gone for getting some occult cure for Radhu. On the way the uncle said, 'Narayana Iyengar of Bangalore, who is a disciple of my sister, came here the other day and promised to dig a well on our land in front of sister's house. But now he is quite silent about it. He is a well-to-do man. If he digs the well it will benefit many. And as for the price of the land, is it so much after all? He can easily spare the money if he has a mind to. To be able to provide for sister's

drinking water — it's no small stroke of good fortune!' In other words the uncle wanted to exploit Sri Iyengar to get a few thousand rupees for a tiny plot of land. The uncle went on, 'Mind you, Varada, if sister saved all the money that she got as gifts, it would come to a good amount. But on the contrary she spends everything for her brothers and Radhi, she does not amass anything. Well, can you say to whom she gives most?' As Varada kept silent, the uncle changed his tone and said, 'Mind you, Varada, sister is honoured by people just because she has no passion for money. If she showed any interest in money such as ordinary people show, she would not command so much respect at all. It's just because of this that she is not human but divine — do you understand, Varada? Ah! You are all blessed! You have given up hearth and home at this early age and are running errands for sister day and night.' In the evening the Mother got a full report of the conversation from Varada and said smilingly, 'Kali is mad after money. "Food is a problem that makes fool of a wise man." He seems to consider his sister a money-yielding tree. But he has a little love and regard for me; in stress and strain it is Kali who stands by his sister. As for the others, the more you give, the merrier they are.'

Then came the day for the ceremony when Radhu's son would eat rice for the first time, and the Mother said to Varada, 'I have not got much in cash this time. To ask Kali to do the marketing means great expense. You purchase the more costly things after proper inquiry from Anur and Kotulpur. Later I shall get some of the smaller items purchased through Kali; otherwise he will fly into a rage.' The Mother then lived with her dependents and women devotees in a separate house.

Uncle Kali was a man of grave countenance and as such struck all with awe. Sisters Nalini, Maku, and Radhu and Radhu's mother were all afraid of him. If the mad aunt became too turbulent, one had simply to say 'Call in Kali for a while,' and she would immediately take shelter

in her room. The Mother knew her brother too well to enrage him. Therefore, on the present occasion, uncle Kali had the sole responsibility for going to the market for purchases for the birthday celebration of the Mother. For some days earlier he went on inquiring about all kinds of odd things about the Mother's household. One day he said, 'Sister, from the number to which the inmates here in your house have swelled, methinks, you can no longer manage with a woman cook; there's need for a male cook. And your birthday is approaching, the gathering will be big, and marketing will have to be done on a good scale. Varada is young and can't manage it all.' The Mother replied, 'Look here Kali, I live in this house with a bevy of girls, how can I keep a male cook among them here? As for these boys living with me, you may consider them rather as my daughters than sons. As regards the devotees, they will be there to be sure, and so the purchasing has to be done carefully.' In the evening the Mother said, 'Look here, the Kotulpur purchases will have to be done through Kali this time. He has been running after that job for some days. If I don't give him a loose rein now and then, he may fly into a rage and create a situation.'

It should be remarked in passing that at this time the Mother had to depend for some of her cooking on non-brahmins. The two boys attending on her were not brahmins. Nonetheless, as the old brahmin woman engaged in the kitchen was not strong enough for the whole work at night, the two boys had to do much of it except for boiling rice etc., which they were not permitted to assist in. The Mother was afraid lest the villagers should find a loophole here and in collusion with the people elsewhere create trouble for her. She had to be cautious in dealing with them, though as a matter of fact uncle Kali and Radhu's husband Manmatha had often their night meal at this house. At last uncle Varada raised the question openly and gave the quietus to it by saying, 'As to that, sister, these Brahmacharis are your disciples — they are pure and

holy. Even rice would be holy if cooked by them. One has a repulsion in eating from any shop in Calcutta; it does not give one any satisfaction.' Uncles Varada and Prasanna were somewhat liberal in these matters, moreover, they were not cliquy; hence the Mother had not much to fear from them. About uncle Kali she had to be circumspect; and the hints he dropped about the kitchen made her wary.

Anyway, uncle Kali made all the purchases for the birthday celebration, the entire management of which rested with him. As a result he looked happy, and the Mother was free from anxiety. But in the afternoon she was sitting sadly on the verandah. They all had finished taking their food and were taking rest; but the Mother had no respite even then. On inquiry, Brahmachari Gopesh (Swami Saradeshananda) got the answer from her; 'My son, this wretch Kali is a constant source of trouble; he worries me without rime and reason. See, for instance, all have eaten, but I am waiting here with his food. He is delaying on one excuse or another; and I, too, can't take rest.' Uncle Kali wanted an absolutely free hand in the day's affair; but somewhere he must have been baffled, and he was now about to teach his sister a lesson. Gopesh understood the situation and hurried to uncle, whom he found busy heaping up hay on his farm-yard. Finding his face flushed and eyes red with anger, Gopesh dare not utter a word, but instead tried to help in the work. In a little while uncle's anger was cooled, and he said, 'Dear boy, why have you come here to take this trouble?' Gopesh got the opportunity he was seeking, and he explained, 'Mother is waiting for you with your food.' 'I never imagined', pleaded uncle, 'that sister was waiting with the food. Let's go.' The Mother was very glad to get him, and sat by him to serve and feed him calmly as though nothing had happened.

Another remarkable incident of the day may be recorded here. When all the monks were busy with the day's

work and merriment — worshipping, cooking, or singing — Gopesh found the Mother busy in her kitchen, arranging for some light diet for uncle Varada's wife who was then expecting a child and was in bad health, but had no other woman in the house to look after her. And, therefore, the Mother had to take care of her, though she lived in a separate house at some distance. The Mother was today the centre of the day's festivity; yet oblivious of the honour, shown to her by others, she thought it her first duty to look after the comfort of her ailing sister-in-law. Accordingly, she quietly dressed the articles for the food, washed them in the pond, cooked them and carried to the patient's house, without any fluster or any sign of dislike in her face.

A few weeks later, and a little while before the birthday of the Master, uncle Kali said, 'Sister, as you are here this time, we shall have to celebrate Paramahansa Mahashaya's (Master's) birthday on a befitting scale. Since you are here many relatives and other people will come to meet you.' The Mother was to start for Calcutta soon after the birthday; and uncle, therefore, talked of many visitors coming to bid her farewell. The Mother replied, 'Brother, where have I the kind of devotion that you have, and where's that capacity to celebrate the Master's birthday on a grand scale after my heart? Manage it somehow with potatoes, pumpkins, and such things as are available in this village. You can well see the state of my health; I am getting weaker day by day.' That was enough, uncle girded up his loins, and on the celebration day he was full of energy and enthusiasm, feeding people to his heart's content till dusk.

Not long after the quarrel between the two brothers we referred to in the beginning of the chapter, uncle Kali strengthened the fence round his farm-yard, made it tidy with a coating of cow-dung, and sat happily on the porch near his sister. In front of the Mother's house were being carried some bags of paddy to uncle Prasanna's barn. When they were a little way off, uncle Kali said in a low

voice, 'For how long have not those two stones (in front) been lying there! They have not been fixed on sister's birth-place. How joyous it will be if with Sarat Maharaj's (Swami Saradananda's) consent that plot of land is purchased in sister's name and a temple is put on it during our lifetime!' Those stones had been brought some time ago by the devotees of Ranchi for marking the birth-place of the Mother; but they had not been placed in position as the uncle could not be made to agree. Turning to the Mother, uncle Kali went on, 'As for my share, sister, I, can transfer it now and here, and the rest you take care of. Sarat Maharaj will pay me as he thinks best. It's my heart's desire that something is done about it right away.' We have to explain here that the portion of the plot of land that belonged to uncle Kali could not be utilized by him in any way, while the two other brothers put their land to use jointly. The Mother listened to him without much comment. In the evening she said to Brahmachari Varada, 'Listen Varada, in your today's letter to Sarat you write everything that Kali says now. When good sense has dawned on Kali, it strikes me, there should be no more delay. Prasanna is in Calcutta; Varada too will not refuse. It was Kali who raised objections at every step. As he mentions the matter of his own accord, it can be taken for granted that it will now be done. Didn't you see, how hard Narayana Iyengar begged to be allowed to dig a well (there) and yet he would not agree on any condition?' In those days Brahmachari Varada, under Saradananda's instruction, wrote daily to the latter informing him of the Mother's condition. Now he appraised the Swami of the new development. Next day the Mother told uncle, 'Varada wrote to Sarat reporting everything you told me yesterday.' 'But, sister', uncle corrected her then and there, 'I shall have to be paid something over and above the price that may be agreed upon. My family is large, and my income is small.' 'As for that,' interceded the Mother, 'won't they also demand more if they get any

'nking of it?' Needless to say that as a matter of fact all the uncles demanded and received something in addition to their individual share of the money. Swami Saradananda, who did not want to let the opportunity slip, finalized the deal and had the document registered without caring for the cost. Sri Narayana Iyengar had proposed to sink a well in a corner of this land. This was begun in summer after the Mother left for Calcutta.

Sometime at the end of September 1918, uncle Prasanna had to leave for Calcutta in connection with his priestly duties there, and to the Mother he said, 'Sister, you have come here now and I have to go to Calcutta. The family is here left behind; do look after them a little. What more can I add? Kali will have the best of it now. He is having a happy time of it, living on his own farm in the midst of his family at home, and you too are here; whereas I have to wander about even in this old age.' As some of these words reached uncle Kali's ears he turned up and began criticizing his brother saying, 'He is whining before sister for extorting money.' Uncle Prasanna, retorted, 'Look here, Kali, whether you have any respect for me or not, know this for certain, that I come just after sister, and you after me. Where's your devotion for sister? you know far less than I do of sister; you care only for her money.' The Mother laughed as she heard it all, and she remarked, 'My brothers are jewels indeed! It's because they had in their previous lives made penances to the extent of beheading themselves that I have been staying in their family.' The Mother did not, of course, depend on them at that time. She had her own house and establishment, and it was the brothers who looked to her for help.

Uncle Prasanna lived mostly in Calcutta; and his income from priesthood was not negligible. Yet he was miserly and calculating perhaps as a result of the poverty of his boyhood days. When his daughter Kamala was two years old, the Mother was at Jayrambati; he himself was

in Calcutta. The girl has fever with some complications. There was need for better treatment, but uncle Prasanna could neither come nor send money. He might have thought that since his sister was there, she would take proper care of the girl. But the Mother could not tolerate this undue dependence, and when she got the news, she said in disgust, 'He will have children every year, and yet why forsooth should he be spending money if any falls sick?' And she became so grave that nobody dared raise the topic again. Fortunately, Kamala recovered through the medicines she had been taking.

The Mother had then dealings with her relatives on three levels—the first the brothers, the second the sisters-in-law and the nieces, and the third the nephews and the sons of her nieces. The difference of age among them was great. The brothers had personal incomes, and yet expected their sister's assistance. Three of her nieces Nalini, Maku, and Radhu and Rahu's mother Surabala had become members of her family for various reasons. And on the third level were the little guideless children. The Mother's dealings on all these levels were adjusted according to the age of her relatives. We have studied her relationship with her brothers. Now we shall learn something of her love and affection towards the other two groups. We shall come to see that though she fulfilled her self-chosen duty towards the grown up people without flinching even under provocation, her mother's heart had its softest, warmest, and most charming expression for these unsophisticated little children.

Uncle Prasanna married Suvasini Devi a year after the death of his first wife Rampriya. Suvasini was then a mere girl and very young as compared with her sisters-in-law. Uncle Kali's wife Subodhabala Devi, Varadaprasad's wife Indumati Devi, and Abhaycharan's wife Surabala Devi, too, were much younger than the Mother. We are acquainted with Surabala well enough, though more of her remains yet to be told. We need not refer to her daughter

Radhu in this chapter. We have come across Nalini and Maku, both daughters of Rampriya Devi, but we have not known them thoroughly enough. About Kamala and Vimala, daughters of Suvasini Devi, we have not much to say. But we shall have to add some words about Subodhbala's son Bhudev, Indumati's son Kshudiram, Maku's son Neda, and Radhu's son Banu. Nalini and Maku were married before Radhu. Nalini Devi could not live with her husband owing to his poverty and the bad treatment she received in the family; and so she lived with the Holy Mother from the time of her mother's death. Maku, though married in a landholders' family at Tajpur, lived with the Holy Mother for various reasons—she seldom went to her father-in-law's house; and her husband Pramatha was often found in the Mother's entourage, as also was Radhu's husband Manmatha.

The Mother had a natural softness for Nalini Devi, deprived as she was of the love of her husband's house; and, therefore, she kept this niece with herself, putting up with all her shortcomings. One night, when all were asleep, Nalini's husband Pramatha arrived from his home at Goghat with a bullock-cart to take his wife home. But she was so afraid of going there that she bolted her door and threatened to commit suicide. The Mother entreated her to come out, but to no effect; and then only when the Mother assured her that she would not be sent, did she come out of her room. The Mother had been all along sitting at Nalini's door with a lighted lantern by her side. When Nalini came out, it was dawn. So the Mother put off the light and repeated the holy names, as was her wont in the morning; 'Ganga, Gita, Gayatri; Bhagavata, Devotee, Deity; Master, Master.' Later she said in course of a talk, 'She (Nalini) has got a trace of her aunt's quality, my boy, and that's why she doesn't want to go.'

Nalini suffered from a craze for purity, which was something like a mania and irritated many. She used to say, 'If aunt (Mother) happens to tread on leaves on which

people had eaten their food, she simply washes her feet and walks into the room; she doesn't even wash her clothes. If on any day she says, "Nalini, give me a little Ganges water", I shall think that she has touched faeces.' Such was her suspicious mind. One winter evening she told the Mother with tears in her eyes that she had touched something impure. Now, she could not bathe in the cold night; and she could neither enter her room nor eat anything without bathing; and consequently she would have to stand out in the cold with bare body for the whole night. 'Why did such a thing happen?' she complained, and she burst into tears. The Mother consoled her, argued with her, but to no avail. 'There's none in this world', wailed Nalini, 'whom I can call my own; my father has married a second time, and he does not so much as look at me; in my husband's house, too, there are enemies', and so on. When the meal-time came she was whining in the same strain. In disgust the inmates planned to teach her a lesson that night — let her stay out the whole night. All went to bed, but before doing so they requested the Mother not to be soft. Yet, at midnight there was the sound of opening of the Mother's door. She came out and called tenderly, 'Nalini, dear daughter Nalini, get up my dear, go to your room. Why do you suffer in the cold outside?' But Nalini made no response. The Mother went on in a mood of soliloquy, 'Ah! Nalini is a child, a little lacking in wisdom, she can't understand and so she flies into a temper and suffers, and others become disgusted with her.' At last the Mother won; Nalini Devi went to her own room to sleep.

Nalini Devi's mind was full of the prejudices common to villagers. At one time some Domes (untouchables) brought some straw loops used as seats for round-bottomed vessels. The Mother said, 'Keep them there.' With great care they deposited the things at the place indicated. Yet Nalini shrieked out, 'There they have touched everything; throw these away.' And she went on reviling them

saying, 'Though you are Domes, how dare you keep things in such a fashion?' The Domes feared they had committed a grievous sin. But the Mother consoled them saying, 'You need not fear, nothing will happen to you.' And she gave them some fried-rice to eat.

There was no love lost between the mad aunt and Nalini; they were always at daggers drawn. Still they belonged to the same family; and the Mother had assumed the task of making them live together. She used to say, 'Whatever you may do, you have, as a matter of fact, to give everybody due attention and consult his opinion. You have to grant a little freedom and watch from a distance so that nothing may go very wrong. Thus, for instance, while I am sending these presents to Radhu's house (at Tajpur) I take counsel from Nalini also. The relation between her and my youngest sister-in-law is that of the snake and the mongoose — the one does not see anything good in the other; and the other does not so much as tread on her shadow. But when I make Nalini my guide and say, "See, Nalini, what things you like; select from these and tell me", then she says with regard to the list I make, 'How can these things suffice, aunt? Howsoever they may deal with you — and as for Radhi, she is as good as mad, having no sense at all — you have surely some dignity; why should you be so illiberal? You do just as it befits you.' She speaks thus and makes the list longer. I, too, laugh inwardly. If I should send the present there without letting her know the two will at once begin to fight a battle of Kurukshetra over that matter. Mind you, one has to give some freedom to each and lower oneself a little. When dealing with these conceited persons, I have to study their moods and move ~~she~~ ^{she} ~~sy~~ cautiously; and yet they fall out now and then — as though it's their nature! How can I help that? I think to myself, "It's His world, He is taking care of it."'

The Mother assumed responsibility for Maku also; for her sake she had to keep in good humour the people at her

husband's house; and she used to say, 'If they are not very properly taken care of, they get offended at the slightest thing.' Maku was only slightly older than Radhu. When the Mother lived with Radhu at Koalpara in 1919, Nalini, in her envy, thought that the Mother was spending money unnecessarily on Radhu, while she was neglecting Maku who was in a very advanced state of pregnancy. Nalini at first said, 'Aunt' why are you so worried? Nothing is the matter with Radhu.' Then she wrangled with the mad aunt in season and out of season. And she advised Maku that it would be much better for her to go away to Jayrambati than to court neglect at Koalpara. Not only that, she had a palanquin brought and she left for Jayrambati with Maku and her son, without so much as consulting the Mother about this move. The Mother was then taking rest after her midday meal; from her bed she heard Nalini shouting to her younger sister, 'Maku, so you keep standing still! Come away quick.' Mortified by this unseemly conduct, the Mother said to Brahmachari Varada, 'She (Maku) did not so much as bring her son (Neda) to salute me when departing. It shall be as they have in store; what else can I do, my dear? But, for you there's this additional task of shuttling between the two places; unless you go every day to inquire about them, the anger will be heightened all the more.'

The Mother wanted and got news every day. When Neda fell ill, she arranged for his treatment. But the boy died after an illness of three days. These facts have already been stated. The Mother was getting ready to go to Jayrambati; but she had not had sufficient time to do so. She cried bitterly at the boy's death, so dear was he to her. That night she could not relish food; but when she knew that others could not take anything unless she did so, she drank a little milk and ate a few *luchis*. Her sorrow was in evidence the next day also; nay, even long after this, her eyes became wet and her voice choked as she talked of this boy. After his death she said, 'The boy must have been

some spiritual aspirant who died in an earlier life before attainment of salvation, or he might have been some holy man. He had a little (of worldliness) left; that much is over — this is his last birth. One cannot find so many good tendencies in a boy of his age. From somewhere he brought *gulantha* flowers every day to worship my feet. He called Sarat (Swami Saradananda) “red uncle”. He could not read or write, being barely two and a half or three years of age. Yet in imitation of Sarat, he sat with a broken wooden box in front and every day wrote (on it) letters to Sarat; and he said by word of mouth whatever news of this place he was sending.’ When on the evening of the day following Neda’s death, Manindra Babu and Prabhakar Babu of Arambagh came to take leave of the Mother, she said with tearful eyes, ‘He (Neda) asked, “Who made the flowers red?” I replied, “The Master has done so.” “Why?” “Because he will put them on.”’ Noticing her eyes wet even eight or ten days after the boy’s death, one devotee asked, ‘I think, you too now realize the sorrow that worldly people have when they lose their children?’ the Mother replied, ‘Does it require to be told? I can’t free myself from the grief that I suffer because of having nurtured Maku’s son.’

We turn to a much earlier incident. Neda was then a child of one year. In the morning the Mother was arranging some fruits and other articles to be offered to the Master, when Neda crawled forward to snatch away one of the peeled plantains. The Mother said tenderly, ‘Tarry a little, my child, you will get it after it has been offered to the Master.’ As the boy did not stop, the Mother pushed him back a little with her hand; but he still pushed forward in the direction of the fruit. The Mother’s attendant now volunteered to carry him away. But she prevented him, put a plantain in Neda’s mouth, and said, ‘Eat, my Gopala, eat.’ There was then a divine softness in her voice and a transcendental light in her eyes and face.¹

1. It is sacriligious to make a present of things meant for God before the worship. The Mother never did so with regard to the articles brought for the

The Mother recollected that Neda called her Sita. She had then lost her teeth, and Neda sat on the steps of a house, dangling his legs and saying 'Take two of my teeth.'

Radhu's son was born in the jungle (*vana*) of Koalpara. Therefore the Mother named him Vanabihari or in short Banu. In the morning, while waking up Banu, she sang just as mother Kausalya would have done when rousing her son Ramachandra:

It's morning; get up my child, thou that art merciful to gods, men,
and saints.

Do thou bathe and offer as gifts, cattle, elephants, gold, and betel-
nuts.

Indumati Devi's eldest son was Kshudiram or Kshudi in short; but as that was also the name of the Master's father; and according to custom, a daughter-in-law may not utter such a name out of respect for him, she pronounced the name as Fudi. As Kshudi loved fruits, the Mother sent these for him in parcels from Calcutta. While at home, she would mix together milk and rice after her meal and wait for the boy who knew of this and turned up in time. Finding him, the Mother would say tenderly, 'Come, my child, I have been calling you.' Kshudi's mother complained, 'It's not good to feed him with so many good things; being a poor man's son, where can he find such things for ever.' The Mother silenced her saying, 'You know nothing, my dear, "He that lives high is helped to do so by the Most High."' The Mother was to start for Calcutta and Kshudi clamoured to accompany her. To pacify the child, she presented him a gold ring she had from Shambhu Roy's wife, and a lump of candy, telling him to take a bite at it whenever he missed her. When Kshudi went to Calcutta with his mother, the

Master. If any emergency arose, she would cook separately, or to pacify importunate children she would give them after a mental offering to the Master. Gopala here means the Lord in His form as a child.

Mother asked the boy affectionately what kind of anklets he would like to have. And Kshudi told her that he liked to have tinkling ones. The Mother said, 'That's good, my child. Gopala has tinkling anklets; you too shall have the same.' She got them made for him. One day she asked the boy, 'What curry had you, my child, with your rice?' He stretched both his hands to show the size of a huge cat fish (*magur*) which his mother had bought. The Mother again asked him, 'Did she give it to you?' The boy complained, 'She gave me only one piece, aunt—she gave away to all others.' The Mother said with a smile, 'Let Indu come, I shall straighten it out with her.' As soon as Indumati Devi turned up in the afternoon, the Mother said, 'Can you imagine? You bought such a big *magur* fish and cooked it; but you gave only one piece to Fudi, and nothing more!' Indumati explained that they had not purchased any fish whatsoever. The Mother laughed and said, 'Hello, dear; my brother Umesh used to talk like that. And Fudi does it so today.' Noticing the devotees worshipping the lotus feet of the Mother, Kshudi placed one tiny hand on her feet, and went on offering handfuls of flowers with the other. The Mother drew him to her lap and said, 'My child, you are all born free. There's no need of flowers any more.'

Indumati Devi fell seriously ill after the birth of her second son Vijay. The Mother called in doctors from various places, and she herself worked so strenuously that she fell ill. After recovery she said to Indumati, 'When a son is born to you, I suffer more than you do, under the apprehension that if anything happens to you, then it's I that shall have to take care (of the child). I can't certainly neglect it.' And she pronounced a queer benediction: 'I bless you so that you may not have any more male issue.' As Indumati Devi began to suffer from the time of Vijay's birth, the Mother named him Dukhiram (sorrowful Rama). But Yogin-Ma and Golap-Ma protested, 'His lot will be cast in accordance with the name you give. Even as it is,

how he is suffering!' Then she changed the name to Vijay.

On the eve of the Jagad-dhatri worship, Vimala, younger daughter of Suvasini Devi had fever with swelling of feet which rendered her unconscious. Dr. Vaikuntha Maharaj after administering medicine told the Mother, 'I gave a dose of medicine just because you asked me to do so. It flowed out, for she has no pulse.' The Mother went to that house on hearing this, and Suvasini grasped her feet, wailed piteously, and taking the dust of those blessed feet mixed it with water to put into Vimala's lips. The Mother passed her hand over the girl's body and then coming to the image of the goddess prayed with folded hands, 'Mother, there will be Your worship tomorrow. Is it Thy will that my eldest sister-in-law shall be mourning then?' Vimala recovered consciousness the same night.

At the time of marriage, Bhudev was thirteen years old; and his wife a little girl. Noticing Subodhbala Devi, mother-in-law of the girl, chiding her, the Mother said jokingly, 'I say, my younger sister-in-law, be quiet, be quiet! "Has the new girl just dropped from nowhere? How much of tomtoming had there been at her marriage how many drums beaten and pipes blown!"' Then with a solemn voice she added 'Why do you scold her? How dear is this daughter-in-law of ours!'

The Mother had reason to laugh at the severe attitude of Subodhbala Devi. When these sisters-in-law came to their husbands, they were inexperienced little girls, and the Mother, as the *de facto* guardian of the whole family, took in hand their training and brought them up lovingly and patiently in spite of their shortcomings. With them she maintained for ever this relation of affection.

Indumati Devi and sister Nalini were then young and did not know how to cook; hence the Mother used to tell them, 'Come to me and learn to cook. Shall I be cooking at your house for ever?' In later years, when Indumati became a perfect mistress of her household, the Mother

had her own separate establishment. She then used to ask Indumati to cook some simple curries which the Master liked most, with figs and greens like *Gima* (*mollugo cerviana*), *Amrul* (*oxalis corniculata*), etc., and said encouragingly, 'You cook the fig curry very nicely.' Once, when Indumati had some digestive trouble, the Mother advised her, 'Look here! Do some *japa* and meditation and then the physical ailment will disappear.' And on another occasion she warned her, 'Look here! You are all very inexperienced; you should do your duties carefully. My Master is very vigilant; if you are careless, you will incur sin.'

On the occasion of the worship of the goddess Manasa, the mother of Balaram Banerji of Jayrambati fed the devotees sumptuously; and hence on returning home no one felt inclined to cook. Nalini, the cook, said, 'We all can manage with a tin of fried-rice, instead of setting out to cook now.' Nevertheless, Suvasini Devi cooked four pounds of rice; and all had their full meals. Next day, the Mother, when engaged in dressing vegetables with others, remarked, 'Nalini forbade cooking; but sister-in-law did it; that saved a tin of fried-rice. Otherwise we would have to call in Mrigendra's mother again today, though she had made the fried-rice for us yesterday. "Blessed is she that understands, no matter whether she's senior or junior."'

Once when the Mother was staying at Kamarpukur for a fortnight, Suvasini Devi happened to send some lotuses and some sweets for her, on receiving which the Mother remarked, 'No one sends me any present in this family—only this one does.' Suvasini was an initiated disciple of the Mother. One day, when old papers were being cleared, a bundle of currency notes, worth fifty or sixty rupees, was thrown out by mistake. When Suvasini found it and brought it to the Mother, the latter said kissing her by touching her chin, 'Gaur-dasi (Gauri-Ma) made this one mine, for Gaur-dasi is very clever.' The Mother at first was against initiating a sister-in-law, saying 'I shan't

impart any *mantra* to persons within the family.' But Gauri-Ma argued, 'How is that so, Mother? Let there be at least one whom you can call your own.' So Suvasini got her initiation. Subsequently, Maku Bhudev and his wife, and Radhu and her husband had initiation.

The Mother was full of praise for anything presented to her by her dear ones. Suvasini Devi once prepared a certain kind of tooth-powder which she knew the Mother liked. She then sent it through her husband to the Mother in Calcutta. The Mother remembered this till her return to Jayrambati when she said to Suvasini, 'The tooth-powder that you sent was highly appreciated by all.' Suvasini regretted before the Mother that though she had taken the *mantra*, she was not having adequate practice. At this the Mother said, 'This work that you are doing is itself a practice—what other practice should there be? Pray to the Master that he may grant you devotion.'

The world has its happiness and sorrow, its ups and downs. In spite of them all the Mother tried to make life joyous for all and to live with all in an atmosphere of cordiality. But there were opposing forces which set at nought all her good intentions. The selfishness of the brothers, the mutual jealousy of the nieces, Nalini's mania for purity, the perversity of Radhu, and the insanity of Radhu's mother—all these combined to produce an intolerable atmosphere in which it was possible for Mother to carry on her self-chosen duty without demur only because of her matchless, patient and forgiving nature. The Mother's domestic life is made up of all this. We have almost come to the end of this sad chapter but for a few words to be added about the mad aunt.

In the beginning of February 1907, Surabala Devi went to her father's house with her box of ornaments. The greedy father annexed the box from his daughter, and this made the aunt all the more unbalanced. One day she went to the shrine of the goddess Simhavahini and bemoaned in this strain; 'Mother, give me my ornaments,

give me my ornaments.' The Mother was then sitting in her own house and talking with another devotee who heard nothing of the cry of Surabala. Indeed, there was no reason why he should from that distance. But the Mother heard her cries and said, 'I am going, I am going. My boy, she has none other than myself. The mad one is crying before Simhavahini for her ornaments.' And she left for the temple. The mad aunt came away with her; but then she changed the burden of her complaint and charged the Mother saying, 'Sister-in-law, it is you who are holding back my ornaments, and it is you who are not returning them.' The Mother replied, 'If I had them I should throw away the trash.' And turning to the devotee she said, 'Girish used to say that she is the mad companion that has come with me.' Some days after this, the Mother sent a devotee with an old servant of the house either to bring Surabala's father or the ornaments. The brahmin came, but not with the ornaments. The Mother implored the old man by taking hold of his feet, 'Kindly save me from this difficulty.' But the covetous old man was obdurate. As a last resort the Mother communicated the whole matter to Calcutta, in response to which Master Mahashaya and Lalit Chatterji, nicknamed Kaiser, came in a few days. Lalit Babu was armed with a letter from a high police officer of Calcutta, with the help of which he got a few constables from Badanganj police station. With this posse of policemen following him, and himself sitting in a palanquin in a full European suit, as though he were a police officer, he proceeded to the old brahmin's house on the day succeeding the Sivaratri festival. But the move raised misgivings in the Mother's mind, lest Lalit Chatterji through his youthful indiscretion should dishonour the brahmin. And so she sent Master Mahashaya also after him. They returned with the brahmin and the ornaments before dusk, and the brahmin handed over the box. The incident ended there; but at 2 a.m. at night the news came to the outer apartment that the Mother was

passing a wholly sleepless night, and that her head was reeling. On being questioned about the cause of this discomfort, she explained, 'On the one hand they all went out in quest of the ornaments, and on the other I kept on thinking the whole day, lest the brahmin should be insulted in any way. This made me nervous; and hence this condition.'

In February 1913, when the Mother was at the 'Udbodhan' in Calcutta, Surabala concluded that the Mother kept Radhu under her control through the power of drugs, and yet she was spending all she had without making provision for the girl. Surabala's mind was, therefore, very much exercised about Radhu's future; and she abused the Mother. One night the Mother became disgusted at such foul language and said sternly, 'Don't you consider me an ordinary mortal. I don't take any offence, though you revile me so much, casting slur on my father and mother, just because I think that these are mere words. Do you think you can have any escape if I am really offended? It's all to your advantage so long as I live. Your daughter will be yours only. I shall be there so long only as she is not properly brought up. Otherwise what attachment have I? I can rend all ties asunder this very moment. You won't so much as have an inkling of my disappearing some day like camphor.' The mad aunt now became a changed person, and explained, 'When did I abuse you, casting slur on your father? I never did such a thing, I made just a simple statement. The trouble is, when you give, you give away without reserve.'

During the Mother's last stay at Jayrambati, her health became very bad and her body weak and emaciated. She hardly had any domestic peace. There was trouble from Radhu who continued to crawl about for six months after child-birth. And over and above all these there was the mad, cross-grained Surabala who was rather quarrelsome. One day she imagined that her son-in-law Manmatha had been drowned. She explored every

corner for him, but could find him nowhere. At last she got into a tank and searched for him there also. Suddenly it flashed in her mind, 'All this is the work of sister-in-law.' She hurried to the Mother at once with wet cloth and cried saying, 'O dear sister-in-law, my son-in-law has been drowned in the Badujye tank. What's to be done now?' In great consternation the Mother called in everybody. One of them said on hearing the whole story, 'I saw Manmatha playing cards in the grocer's shop.' 'Run,' said the Mother, 'and bring him here.' Manmatha came immediately, and the mad aunt retired abusing the Mother nevertheless.

What followed is extremely sad to contemplate. Mother quite lost her patience. She was perhaps preparing for the final departure, and before her earthly play was over she wanted to take back with her the mad companion also.

On the evening of the above-mentioned incident the Mother was dressing vegetables for the night, when the cranky and cantankerous Surabala burst in upon her with the charge: 'It's you who have been administering opium to Radhu with a view to crippling her and keeping her under your thumb.' Whether the devotees believed it or not, the Mother was then really eager to free herself from all bonds, however self-chosen they might have been. And hence with the greatest unconcern she said, 'Why don't you take away your daughter? There she lies. Have I kept her concealed?' The mad aunt did not want facts or reason; she was on the war path. This apathetic and calm response of the Mother stirred her mettle. She started abusing violently and her pugnacity blazed up by stages, until at last she was grill red with anger. Then taking in hand a piece of fuel, she tried to strike the Mother on the head. Frightened by that terrible sight, the Mother shrieked out helplessly, 'Hello, who is there, the mad woman is killing me.' Brahmachari Varada ran in to find the log about to fall on the head. He snatched it

away in the twinkling of an eye, drove the crazy woman out of the main gate, and shaking with anger forbade her to enter those precincts again. When he returned to the Mother, he found her still in a ruffled mood in the midst of which these words shot out of her lips: 'Mad woman, what were you about to do? That hand of yours will fall off from your body.' And just as she had uttered these in a state of fury, she regained her own innate composure and biting her tongue as a sign of remorse for an unintentional lapse, she looked at the Master's picture with folded hands and said penitently, 'Master, what's this that I have done? What's the remedy now? Hitherto no curse against anybody had ever escaped my lips; and yet that, too, comes to pass at last! Why tarry longer then?' She was weeping then. That compassion and self-reproach kept Varada spell-bound and his own anger melted away.

The mad aunt was attacked with leprosy not long after the passing away of the Mother, as a result of which she lost her fingers. However, she had not to suffer much. She passed away not long after to repair to her own place at the lotus feet of the Holy Mother.

A GUIDING FORCE

The Mother visited Bodh Gaya at the end of March 1890. On that occasion the contrast between the wealth of the monastery there on the one hand, and on the other the absence of any permanent residence, the indescribable want of food and raiment, and the hard physical labour for running the monastery on the part of her world-renouncing sons, moved very much the Mother of the Order. She said subsequently, 'Ah! For this, how I shed tears and prayed to the Master! And only then, through his grace has come into existence today the Math (monastery). When the Master left his body, the boys gave up the world and gathered together round a (rented) shelter for some days. Then they scattered about independently and went on roaming about here and there. Then I felt intensely sad and prayed thus to the Master, "Master, you came, played and disported with these few and then went away; and should everything end with that? If so, where was the need for coming down in the midst of so much sorrow. I have seen in Banaras and Vrindaban many holy men who get their food by begging and shifting their 'residence' from the shadow of one tree to that of another. There's no dearth of holy men of that type. I shan't be able to bear the sight of my sons, who come out in your name, going about begging for food. My prayer is, that those who leave the world in your name may never be in need of bare subsistence. They will all live together holding to your ideas and ideals; and the people afflicted with the worries of the world will resort to them and be solaced by hearing about you. That's why you came. My heart is pained to see them wandering about." After that, Naren (Swami Vivekananda) began gradually building up all this.'

Every sentence here reveals her infinite motherly love and solicitude for the Order, her firm grasp of and convic-

tion about the uniqueness of the Master's message and its future possibilities and her earnestness for having a permanent habitation for her children. These hopes and desires were not mere idle fancies of her mind; as long as she was on this earth, she did her utmost to see the Order well established and ably managed. Love, according to her, was the life-force of the Order. As every member thereof looked up to her for her benign blessing, so also she wanted each of its units to be tied to others by the bond of affection, so that a solid brotherhood might emerge defying all disruptive tendencies. The head of the Koalpara Ashrama expected work from the Brahmacharis under him; but in return he showed neither active love for them, nor concern for their welfare; and there was no proper arrangement for their food and clothing. The result was that many left the Ashrama to live with the Mother or with Swami Saradananda. Still the head did not mend his ways; on the contrary he approached the Mother in a mood of wounded justice and said, 'Mother, formerly they were all very obedient; now they have their eyes opened, they are not always willing to continue under my control. Besides, if they go either to Sarat Maharaj (Swami Saradananda) or yourself, you keep them with love and care, and they get advantage of better food. If you don't keep them, but explain things to them and send them back to me, then they will be obedient to me.' Amazed at such a talk, the Holy Mother, love incarnate as she was, said, 'How is that so? What's all this you are talking about? Love is our forte. It's through love that the Master's family has taken shape. And I am a mother; how could you talk to me twittingly about the food and clothing of my sons?'

The head of the Ashrama did not take adequate care of even the health of the inmates, though they suffered from malaria. When the Mother came to know of this, she had nourishing food arranged for them. She also expressed her disapproval of the authoritarianism of the

head by saying, 'How so, my boy? If you go on exercising authority in this way with diplomacy at the back of your mind, how can the Ashrama go on? May be, the boys are all your pupils, yet even if one scolds one's own son, excess of it results in separation.'

The Mother had the greatest affection for the head, and he too was profoundly devoted to her; but that was no reason why she should wink at callousness. When the Mother was at the Koalpara Ashrama with Radhu, the head informed the Mother one day that the Brahmacharis did not want to stay there, and that they had left for other places, and so the Mother should make it impossible for them to find shelter anywhere else and thus compel them to stay at Koalpara to serve the Mother. This suggestion enraged her and she said, 'What would you have me say to them? Do you expect me to tell them that they shall not find quarters anywhere? They are my sons, and have come to the Master; the Master will look after them wherever they may be. And you would have me say that they shall be refused accommodation everywhere. I shall never say that.' All became awed at the Mother's flushed face and loud voice. The devoted head at once fell at her feet and begged for mercy.

Though the Mother corrected the head when the need arose, she also advised the inmates to be disciplined and forbearing. A few days earlier than the incident related above, she said to a Brahmachari, 'Look here, every one has to be accommodating. The Master used to say, "*sha, sha, sa*"¹. Forbear everything. He is there to judge.' In spite of the numerous inconveniences of a corporate life, she advised the monks to live unitedly in the Ashramas and such other places and work there.

Swamis Vishuddhananda, Shantananda, and Girijananda left home through extreme dislike for the world and

1. In colloquial Bengali *Sa* (*saha*) means forbear; and in the Bengali alphabet there are three 's' sounds (sibilants), as shown above. Punning on these letters, the Master emphasizes thrice the need of forbearance.

walked from Calcutta to Jayrambati. They, and particularly Swami Vishuddhananda, wished with the Mother's blessing to become itinerant monks, spending the rest of their lives outside Ashramas in austerity at holy places. The Mother welcomed them affectionately, heard them attentively, and fed them with tender care. Next morning she said, 'Shave your heads today and have your clothes coloured with ochre; I shall sanction your Sannyasa (formal renunciation) tomorrow.' Next day (July 29, 1907) she handed over to each of them his ochre garment and prayed to the Master, 'Master, protect their (vow of) renunciation. Wherever they may be—on hills or mountains, in forests or wildernesses—grant them their little sustenance.' But she did not at all like the idea of their itineration: and hence on the eve of bidding farewell to them she said, 'There's no need for you to undergo such hardship. But since you have resolved to be wandering monks, I grant you this much as a last resort—you walk up to Banaras. There I am writing to Tarak (Swami Shivananda); he will accommodate you. Live with him to build up your life of monasticism. Also take your monastic names from him.' Accordingly, they started for Banaras. The Mother accompanied them to the border of the village and there bade adieu with tearful eyes. When they reached Banaras, Swami Shivananda did as he was directed.

We now come to an event in April 1911, when a monk was staying at the 'Udbodhan' after committing a serious offence. Revered Swami Brahmananda and other aged monks wanted him to leave the 'Udbodhan' and go to the Belur Math. But he was loth to comply. About him Swami Saradananda one day submitted to the Mother, 'Should Maharaj's (Swami Brahmananda's) words, our words be totally ignored? Let him go to the Math for at least a couple of days just for the sake of respecting Maharaj's order.' A few days later the Mother alluded to this talk and said that she herself had advised him to go to

the Math, but with no result. About him she said regretfully, 'To be sure, it concerns a superior's command! The truth is, he has no mind to work. Does the mind remain healthy if one doesn't? Is it possible to do *japa* and meditation all the twenty-four hours? One should have some other useful engagement. That will keep the mind well.' But though she tried in vain to change the monk's mind, she never showed any the less affection for him.

A year after this, a son of hers represented that according to some it was not befitting a monk's life to run hospitals, sell books, keep accounts, etc.; that the Master had done no such thing; that if anyone was in need of engagements one should have recourse to such practices as worship, *japa*, meditation, and singing the Lord's name, as all other works would deflect the mind from God. Having heard it all through, the Mother said finally, 'If you don't work, with what will you occupy yourself day and night? Is it possible to meditate and make *japa* all the twenty-four hours? They refer to the Master! He is an exception, and Mathur supplied him his dainty dishes. You get your food just because you have engaged yourself in some work here. Otherwise would you not be moving from door to door for a morsel of rice? Everything shall go on as the Master ordains. The Math will run as it is doing now. Those who can't put up with this will clear out.'

During her stay at Banaras in 1912, the Mother remarked while visiting a widow's home managed by the local Ramakrishna Mission, 'By serving these helpless old women one serves Narayana (God) Himself. Ah! What a fine piece of work these boys are doing!' And about this same institution she said on another occasion, 'All this is His wish, my daughter! He knows best how He is getting His plan executed and through what.'

About *japa* and meditation she said one day at Jayrambati, 'How many can carry on *japa* and meditation all the time? It's much better to work, keeping the mind fixed and without letting it wander about. The mind creates

trouble whenever it is let loose. It's because Naren realized this that he started selfless work.'

The Mother had not a shadow of doubt that the Master would work out his new message through his Order. One day a certain head of a monastery regretted before the Mother that owing to the lack of practical public sympathy, the work was not progressing satisfactorily; for our countrymen knew only how to destroy and not how to build. To this the Mother replied with conviction, 'My son, the Master said, "When the southern breeze blows, all trees that have developed hard-wood get transformed into sandal." The southern breeze has blown; now all will be turned into sandal—except bamboos and bananas.'

Many problems of the Ashramas and their inmates either came to her notice or were placed before her by others, and in each case she gave advice and suggested remedies. To the charitable dispensary at Koalpara came many patients who had the means to purchase medicines elsewhere. Discovering this, the head of the centre approached the Mother with the request that she might sanction the discontinuance of such practice. But she stretched her vision beyond that of an ordinary mortal and said that any one who came to beg must be considered needy and as such should not be turned out. So the dispensary continued to be open to all.

Before this Ashrama was incorporated into the Ramakrishna Organization, the inmates of the institution had active sympathy for the Swadesi movement, which aimed at bringing the British government to its senses through boycott of foreign goods and patronage of home-made ones. The Mother noticed that their energy was being frittered away by mere talk, and so she said, 'Look here, don't you simply move about agitating and shouting "*Vande-mataram*" (Salutation to the mother country); have looms and weave cloth. I wish I had myself a spinning wheel. Do something constructive.' And we have mentioned elsewhere how with a view to basing the Ashrama

activities on spirituality, she installed there with her own hands the Master as the presiding Deity.

She was also eager to instil into the Brahmacharis of the Ashrama a thirst for knowledge. To those who served her she said one day, 'Mind you, many devotees will come from foreign lands: you master the English language.' For this work she first engaged Swami Dharmnanda and then Krishnabhūsan Babu of Dacca.

She praised work; but then she was not blind to its evil consequences. Some monks start monasteries with the best of motives, but the contact with the world and worldly people often exerts a baneful influence over their minds and diverts them from the path of God. So the Mother said to Swami Tanmayananda, 'Should one jump out of a frying pan to enter into the fire! Instead of calling on the Lord after leaving the world one merely occupies oneself with work. An Ashrama is a second household. People leave home for the Ashrama; but they become so much attached that they don't want to leave an Ashrama.'

Another point to be noted in the Mother's life was a charming combination of maternal tenderness with non-attachment. With heart and soul she wished for the good of all her children. Once, at Jayrambati, at the time of the worship of Durga, when all had departed after offering flowers at her sacred feet at the most sacred moment of the juncture of the eighth and ninth days of the moon, the Mother said to a Brahmachari, 'Bring more flowers, and offer them on behalf of Rakhal, Tarak, Sarat, Khoka (Subodhananda), Yogen (Yogin-Ma), and Golap (Golap-Ma). Offer flowers in the names of all my known and unknown children.' Accepting the worship, she sat silently for a long time with folded hands before the Master and then prayed, 'Let all prosper, here and hereafter.' On another occasion during her birthday at the 'Udbodhan' in 1918, when all went away after adoring her with flowers, she called Brahmachari Varada to herself, blessed him by laying her hand on his head, and then directed him, 'Offer

flowers in the names of all at Jayrambati and Koalpara; for this is a special day.' When this was done, she prayed to the Master for the weal of all.

Only those with personal experience of that affection will realize how deep and rare it was and through what diverse channels it flowed. Brahmachari Jnan (Swami Jnanananda) suffered at Jayrambati from itches which became so pervasive and painful that he could not eat with his hand; and so the Mother mixed the rice and curries for him and put them morsel by morsel into his mouth. Brahmachari Rashbihari, while busy in connection with the work of the new house of the Mother at Jayrambati, had to go on an errand to a distant village from which he could not return in time for his noon-meal. It was winter when days were short. Returning only a few hours before sunset, he was taken aback to learn that the Mother waited for his return and would not sit for her meal. He remonstrated, 'Mother, your health is bad, yet why have you kept fasting till this hour?' The Mother replied, 'My son, how can I eat so long as you have not done so?' Rashbihari sat down for his food without further delay; and the Mother and other women, who had been waiting for her, sat only after he had finished. How many mothers are so very considerate for their own children?

Swami Vrajeshwarananda worked heart and soul at the Belur Math and was loved by the older monks. Once it struck him, 'Instead of gratifying my self-importance in this way by getting the indulgence of the old monks, it is better to go outside to undertake austerity.' But he knew that he would not get the approval of the Math authorities; and, therefore, he went to Calcutta to obtain the Mother's sanction. He bowed down before her and opened out his mind. The Mother wanted to know where he would go and whether he had any money with him. Vrajeshwarananda said that he was penniless and that he would walk up to Banaras along the Grand Trunk Road. The Mother then said with the tenderest tone. 'This is Kartika (October-

November), (when) people say that all the four doors of Yama (Death) are open. I am a mother; how can I say, "My son, you go"? Moreover, you say, you have nothing with you; who will feed you, my boy, when you are hungry?' Vrajeshwarananda abandoned his plan.

As misfortune would have it, someone was leaving the Order. As he came to bid farewell, the Mother began to weep and so also did the devotee. A little later she wiped her tears with the edge of her cloth and asked the devotee to wash his face in the bathroom. Then she said, 'Don't forget me. I know you won't; still I say so.' 'What about you, Mother?' asked the devotee. 'Can a mother forget?' replied the Mother, and she added, 'Believe me I shall ever be with you. Don't be afraid.' When the devotee got down on the road, the Mother kept on looking at him from the window till he could be seen no more.

Once the head of the Koalpara Ashrama commented that the boys moved from one monastery to another simply for the sake of good food. Alluding to this the Mother said, 'Notice what a queer remark it is! Why should my sons, the Master's sons, lack food? They shall not. I myself prayed to the Master, "O Master, may your sons never suffer for want of food." And he insinuates that they run about because of their greed!'

Brahmachari Rashbihari reached Jayrambati in 1907 with an extreme repulsion for the world in his heart and with a single piece of cloth round his person. On the way, it did of course occur to him that he should return home to get more clothes; but lest some hindrance should crop up, he preferred to move on without any spare clothes in hand. The Mother received him cordially, gave him another cloth which she asked him to take away when leaving Jayrambati, and she offered to pay him his return fare, which, however, he refused as he had no need of it. At the time of departure the Mother said, 'Write to me after reaching there;' and added sorrowfully, 'I could not feed my son properly.'

And yet what a number of people were granted Sannyasa, and were thus helped to leave home, by this very soft-hearted mother! True it is that she did not permit taking Sannyasa indiscriminately; her advice about marriage and celibacy varied according to circumstances. Reading the future of the inquirer with her divine eyes, she said to the monks at times, 'What a sad lot is that of householders! You'll now heave a sigh of relief and sleep soundly.' At other times she said to wavering bachelors, 'I can't venture any opinion about that. If you are unhappy after wedlock you'll say, "Mother, you consented to my marriage."' Some devotee would say, 'Mother, I won't marry.' And to this the Mother might reply with a smile, 'How is that? All things in the world are arranged in pairs. Look here, for instance, there are two eyes, two ears, two hands, two feet—just so are husband and wife.' That devotee got wedded. Some one else would say, 'Mother I have no desire to marry; my parents want to make me do so per force.' The Mother would reply at once, 'See, see, what oppression!' Once a devotee said to her, 'Mother, I have tried so long to remain a bachelor; now I see, I shan't be able to continue.' The Mother said reassuringly, 'Why be afraid? There were quite a number of householder devotees of the Master. You need not be afraid, you can wed.'

It was not easy to understand the Mother's mind in such situations; curiosity was, therefore, rampant. The widow of Navasan one day expostulated, 'Mother, all your sons are equal; and yet to one who seeks your opinion regarding marriage, you give your consent for it; and him who wants to leave the world, you advise approvingly eulogizing renunciation. It should rather be your duty to lead all along the path that is best.' The Mother answered, 'Will a man whose thirst for enjoyment is great obey me even if I prohibit it? And should I not help him a little who through his immense good luck has seen through this play of maya and clings to Him as the only reality?'

My daughter, is there any end to the woes of the world?'

Even if we take it for granted that one should assist a monk in the path of his renunciation, the question arises, 'Who can recognize such a passionless man, and after such recognition who can help him?' The Mother knew well enough that a layman cannot have the same outlook as a monk. We are not taking into consideration such persons as the widow of Navasan in whom affliction in life and devotion towards the Mother had generated a veneration for the ochre garb; we have here in mind people who have the clarity of vision and are willing to help souls that are free from attachment. How many are there of such a high calibre? When the Mother was at Jayrambati for the last time there came a young man who had obtained the M. A. degree. He said that he was in a dilemma. Understanding that he was desirous of the monastic life, Swami Shivananda of the Belur Math had encouraged him heartily; but considering the shock that his mother would get, Master Mahashaya had been advising delay.¹ The Mother listened without any commitment. Later she told Brahmachari Varada, 'He has his mother and brother at home, which is near Master's (Master Mahashaya's). Hearing that he wants to become a monk, Master is dilly-dallying and saying, "What harm is there if you don't take orders so hurriedly?" But at the Math, Tarak (Shivananda) is giving him much encouragement. After all, Master is a householder, and Tarak an unsophisticated holy man. Ah! To accept the Master's (Sri Ramakrishna's) ideal of renunciation is the result of great good fortune. Tarak has spoken rightly. How many can rise up if they once dive into the world? The boy has great strength of mind.' When the young man saluted her again the next day, she blessed him heartily and said, 'May your wish be

1. Though Master Mahashaya seemed to be a little reserved in this particular case, in actuality he inspired many to take to a life of renunciation.

‘fulfilled, my boy. What Tarak has said is absolutely true.’

Rammay was then quite young. He was reading for the B.A. degree. Everyone in the Mothers’ household knew that he wanted to become a monk. One noon the Mother was cleaning her teeth with powder, while Rammay stood by her. Suddenly Nalini Devi said, ‘Just see, dear aunt, how fine this boy is. He has passed two examinations, (Matriculation and Intermediate Arts), and is now reading for the third. With what sacrifice his parents brought him up and are now defraying his expenses for education! And here the good boy wants to become a holy man! He should be earning to feed them, but he has no such thought!’ ‘What can you understand?’ interposed the Mother. ‘They are not the crow’s fledglings but the cuckoo’s. As they grow, they recognize their true mother and fly away from the nursing mother to their true mother.’¹ Rammay became a monk subsequently under the name Swami Gaurishwarananda.

When the Mother was at Jayrambati for the last time, a young man named Manasa got the ochre robe from her; and much elated thereby, he sat in the drawing-room of uncle Kali to sing sweetly some songs on goddess Kali, songs which charmed Maku and Radhu who sat by him, as also the Holy Mother and some of the aunts who heard from a distance. One of the aunts remarked, ‘Sister-in-law has turned that boy into a monk.’ And Maku joined in saying, ‘With what expectations the parents of this boy brought him up; and all these are now dashed to the ground! Marriage, too, is a virtuous act in this world. If aunt goes on making monks in this way, Mahamaya will become angry with her. If they want to take orders, let them do so by themselves; why should aunt be instrumental in this?’ After she had finished, the Mother said, ‘Maku, they are all divine children; they will live on this

1. Refers to the habit of cuckoos laying eggs in crows’ nests. The crows hatch the eggs and feed the young cuckoos till they can fly.

earth as pure as flowers. What can be happier than that? Haven't you seen into the happiness of this world? I am getting my very bones scorched by the fiery ordeals of your family lives.'

Even though naturally inclined to a life of renunciation, the Mother was very careful about granting Sannyasa. Since Swami Keshavananda was the only son of his mother, she did not at first consent to his renouncing the world; but when she was assured that he had his mother's approval she gladly agreed. As the Swami suffered from asthma and was in bad health, his mother prayed to the Holy Mother before he embraced the monk's life that she might not have to see her son die before her. The Mother granted the boon, which was duly fulfilled.

In 1913, Brahmachari Devendra came to Jayrambati from Banaras and prayed for Sannyasa. The Mother inquired about the condition of his family and when she became satisfied that the family would not suffer by losing him, she permitted him to get the ochre robes from Koalpara and granted him Sannyasa on the next day.

Again, when during her last illness at the 'Udbodhan', she was informed of the death of the father of a young man living with her, she inquired of him about his family affairs and said subsequently, 'Can you understand why I asked you today so much about your family, and your mother? When I first got the news of your father's death from G. I asked him on whom else your mother could depend, whether she had sufficient provision for her maintenance, and whether she could do without you. Having been told that she can manage even if she loses you, I thought within myself, "Good! As the boy has a noble intention, there won't be any great hindrance to his continuing in the holy path."'

Once she had granted Sannyasa after thorough inquiry, she was not to be swerved from her decision by criticism, nay, not even by tears; for it was her conviction that one who renounced for God was really blessed. Soon after an

aspirant had left Jayrambati with ochre clothes granted by the Mother, his mother and wife came there weeping bitterly for securing a cancellation, and complaining that such indiscretion was going to ruin a family. But the Mother firmly told them, 'He has not done any wrong, he has chosen the right path; and I have been told that he has provided for your maintenance.' They were pacified by the Mother's affection and persuasion and left Jayrambati in a peaceful frame of mind.

Instances are not rare when she set her face against Sannyasa. Once a woman disciple of hers wrote that her husband had been repeatedly telling her, 'You go away with your children and live with your parents. I shall not live in the world any longer, but shall become a monk.' Every line of the woman's letter was full of piteous wail and helpless cry for succour. Hearing the letter read, the Mother said with some emotion, 'Just see the impropriety of the thing! He will be a monk, forsooth! Why did he marry? If you really want to give up, first make suitable arrangement for the subsistence of your dependents.'

Once there came two devout young men on the first day of the worship of Durga. They offered lotuses at the Mother's feet and prayed for Sannyasa. There was in their talks and demeanour an unnatural sentimentalism at which the Mother smiled; and when they showed their eagerness for Sannyasa she dissuaded them saying, 'That will come in due course, my boys.' They went away disappointed.

In her estimation, the ideal of Sannyasa was very high. About a monk she said one day, 'Why should he live with a householder just because he is ill? There are Maths and Ashramas. A monk is a model of renunciation. If a wooden female doll should lie upturned on the road, a monk shall not so much as turn it with his feet to have a look at it. And it's extremely wrong for a monk to possess money. There's nothing that the round discs can't do, even to the extent of jeopardizing life.' At times, she was strict with her own sons on these matters. Returning to

Calcutta from Rameswaram she made inquiries about a monk and was told that he had been pining to see her for the last three or four months. Instead of being flattered by this, she said with annoyance, 'How strange! A monk should go beyond attachment. Even a golden chain is no less a fetter. A monk shouldn't become a victim of attachment. What's this that they talk so often of motherly love, and complain, "I haven't been vouchsafed the Mother's love" ? What's all that? To have the men-folk always moving about me, well, I don't like all that. The frame at least is human. Consideration of Divinity comes only after that. I have to live with girls and women of respectable families. Ashu used to be always stirring about upstairs in connection with making sandal-paste and such odd jobs; I reprimanded him.'

A man renounces the world in order to be freed from its worries, so that he may more fully adhere to God. Meditation on God is his bounden duty. A monk who had gone to Rishikesh, a well-known place for practising austerity at the foot of the Himalayas, wrote, 'Mother, you said, "You will see the Master in time." But I have not been granted this up till now.' On hearing the letter read, the Mother said with annoyance, 'Do write to him, "The Lord is not under any obligation to come forward to meet you just because you have gone to Rishikesh." He has become a monk. What will he do now except to call on God? God will reveal Himself when it pleases Him.'

A monk has to be vigilant about his own dignity of demeanour. Brahmachari Girija went to Jayrambati, some time in 1906. He was not yet a monk in the real sense of the term. Uncle Prasanna was then about to start for his second wedding ceremony and invited him to join the nuptial party. But the Mother intervened and said, 'He is a monk; he need not go.' Next day, at meal-time at noon the Mother said to Girija, 'My boy, shall I serve you curd?' Girija, out of natural modesty, said, 'No, I don't need it.' And the Mother added approvingly, 'Better

not take this curd, since this is associated with the marriage.'

Once when there was a proposal for Swami Shantananda's going to Banaras with a noted devotee of the Master, the Mother said, 'You are a monk; the railway fare will be so difficult for you to get. They are householders, why should you go with them? You will be travelling in the same compartment; who knows, they may say to you, "Do this, do that." You are a monk, why should you be doing all that?' As the news of one of the disciples of the Mother having changed his ochre robe for the white dress of a householder reached the Mother, she said with disgust, 'An earthen vessel can't hold a lioness's milk. By continuously eating food at the houses of wordly men his mind has become polluted.'

By showing respect towards monks and monasticism, she made people respect them. Although she granted Sannyasa to almost all of the Koalpara Ashrama, she did not give the ochre robe to young Varada because he had to run errands for the Mother and Radhu. When asking him to do certain things, the Mother used to tell him now and then, 'If you wore the ochre garment, my son, could I order you to do these? I would feel hesitant even if you touched my feet with your hands.' As this meant delay in becoming a monk, the Mother consoled him saying, 'You need have no anxiety at all. Afterwards whenever you feel the hankering you have merely to approach Sarat (Saradananda), and he will arrange for it.' For the same reason the Mother did not give Sannyasa to her boy attendant Brahmachari Hari (Haripremananda).

The Mother was present at a birthday celebration of the Master at the Belur Math. After the midday meal Brahmachari Rashbihari poured water on her hands for cleaning them; and as it was her custom to wash the feet also on such occasions, the Brahmachari poured water on her feet and proceeded to clean them with his hands, when the Mother said, 'No, no, my son, not you! You are worthy

to be worshipped by gods.' And she wiped her feet with her own hands. Rashbihari was then only a novice.

On another occasion the Mother was at the 'Udbodhan' with Radhu. The latter had anklets that jingled as she walked fast. One day as she descended quickly from the second floor to the first, the Mother heard the sound of those anklets; and when Radhu came nearer she said, 'Radhi, are you devoid of shame? Down there live all my Sannyasi sons, and you run about making your anklets jingle aloud! What will they think? Do take off your anklets at once. These boys and girls that live here, have not gathered here for the mere fun of it; they have come for spiritual practices and discipline. What will be the result if their discipline is undermined?' Radhu took off her anklets and threw them away in a huff. Another day, after bath, Radhu was seen combing her hair and tastefully arranging the locks by pressing them with a towel. This, too, annoyed the Mother, and she said so. The fact was that though she was the absolute mistress of the house, she looked to the spiritual needs of the monks for whose good she maintained all round the strictest vigilance.

This reverence for monks and anxiety for discipline were evident elsewhere as well. When she was at Koalpara with Radhu, she was dictating a list for the market to Brahmachari Varada. A woman devotee happened to pass that way, and her cloth inadvertently brushed against the Brahmachari's back. The Brahmachari hardly noticed it; but the Mother did and reproved the woman saying, 'How is this, my dear? Why do you walk about so carelessly? They are Brahmacharis. They are to be honoured. Bow down before him.'

Though the householders were as dear to her as the monks, the monks were in some sense more closely related to her. She used to say, 'My boy, if the world-renouncing ones were not there, with whom could I live?' One day an elderly woman devotee had some altercation with some-

monk at the 'Udbodhan', as a result of which she left the house saying, 'By no means shall I return so long as he is there.' She defied all persuasion to retrace her steps. When the Mother came to know of all this, she felt vexed and said, 'What is she? A lay woman! If she wants to leave this place, let her do so. The monks live here after renouncing all for me.' A monk asked the Mother, 'Mother, are not all equal who have taken refuge in the Master, irrespective of their being monks or householders, inasmuch as they will all be freed?' The Mother answered, 'Good gracious! Can the monk and the householder be equal? The householders are a prey of passions and desires, while the monks have come away leaving everything behind. Whom else have these besides the Lord? Can they be compared with monks?'

Though she revered the monks, she cautioned them against pride. When Arupananda said to her, 'Mother, Sannyasa brings with it a great conceit,' the Mother corroborated him with the remark, 'Yes, a great conceit—"I haven't been saluted, I am not honoured, I have not been treated with the respect due to me!" Compared with all that, I am much better as (pointing to her white cloth) I am (i.e., with internal renunciation).'

In fact, she valued inner detachment more than outer trappings. Brahmachari Sadhan took the ochre robe from her and then inquired about the formalities he would have to go through for becoming a monk. The Mother told him slowly and solemnly, 'Faith and firmness are the basic things; if faith and firmness are there, then you have it all.' But as the Brahmachari was not satisfied with the answer, he reverted again and again to the question of ceremonies till at last the Mother was constrained to say, 'Get those things done by my sons at the (Belur) Math.'

It strikes us as though the Mother drew a line between the wearing of the ochre cloth as a help to spiritual discipline and as a reminder of a new path voluntarily chosen, and the renunciation of everything after formally perform-

ing the *Viraja-homa*, the scriptural sacrifice preceeding life-long monasticism. A clerk in the Bihar Secretariat felt disgusted with the world and came to the Mother for the ochre robe. The Mother having granted his wish, he retired to the Himalayas for austerity. As the other monks there advised him to perform the *Viraja-homa*, he sought the opinion of the Mother, who wrote in reply, 'I did not permit you to perform the *Viraja-homa* as it is a difficult matter.' The Mother, perhaps saw the inmost heart of this devotee, for he returned home after a long time.

In some cases, again, she did not sanction Sannyasa, but sent the candidates to other Sannyasis. In 1911, Swami Ramakrishnananda brought a young man named Surendra Vijay to the Mother at the 'Udbodhan' and requested her, 'Mother, this boy is accompanying me to Madras. Will you kindly initiate him into Sannyasa?' The Mother answered, 'Let Sarat do it.' But Swami Saradananda replied, 'I can't know anybody's mind; and as for Sannyasa and such things, it is for Maharaj (Swami Brahmananda) to grant it or not.' Then the Mother said, 'Then let him have it at Puri from Rakhal.' Perhaps, in this case also, the Mother knew the young man's mind; for he returned home soon after.

When Swami Jagadananda approached her for Sannyasa, she gave him the ochre cloth after touching with it the feet of the Master and her own head, and then said 'I am giving you the ochre cloth; but have the *Viraja-homa* done under Rakhal's guidance at the (Belur) Math and get the (Sannyasa) name from him.'

Her attitude to Brahmachaya (the vow of celibacy), was unique. She helped many in this path. There was nothing of formality here; there was only the compassionate approval of the guru, coupled with the resolution of the disciples born of their unswerving faith and irrepressible longing. They might not belong to the Order, though many of those initiated thus entered the Ramakrishna Order in due course. We give here a single illustration.

In 1911, Surendranath Gupta went to Jayarambati and then to Kamarpukur with Brahmachari Gopesh. In course of a talk Surendranath came to learn that Gopesh was initiated into Brahmacharya by the Mother. Surendranath was then in Government service; but he longed for Sannyasa. Naturally, therefore, he was attracted towards Brahmacharya, and purchasing a new piece of cloth at Kamarpukur he returned to the Mother to get initiation into Sannyasa. The Mother inquired about his dependants and then showed the new piece of cloth to the Master and handed it over to Brahmachari Jnan saying, 'You form it into the outer and inner garbs.' When Surendranath proposed to resign from his post, the Mother advised him to continue for some time more in service pointing out that it was good to help the Lord's devotees with a portion of one's income. He obeyed this direction for some time and then repeated this request; the Mother did not consent even then. At last after the Mother's passing away, he freed himself completely from his domestic obligations and embraced the monastic life under the name Swami Sasangananda.

As in the case of men, so also in the case of devout women seekers, the Mother was of opinion that if there were suitable arrangements for sustenance and protection, they too might lead a celibate life. When the daughter of Narayana Iyengar of Mysore wanted to take up the vow of celibacy, the Mother asked Swami Saradananda to write a letter to that effect to Sri Iyengar. On another occasion, when a girl refused to marry, her mother approached the Holy Mother to persuade the girl to obey her parents. But the Mother said, 'Is it a small misery to be a slave to another and to pander to his whims for a whole life?' And then she explained that though a celibate life had its own risks, it was improper to force any girl into wedlock against her will.

Having considered Sannyasa and Brahmacharya in passing, we return to our main topic, the Ramakrishna

Order. Though the Mother was not directly associated with its management, still she guided it from a distance through counsel and spiritual influence, and by strengthening the bonds of love. Her relationship with the different limbs of the Organisation under such circumstances is an interesting study. They were all junior to her, being disciples of the Master, of herself, or of the disciples of the Master. That relationship foreshadowed love on the one hand and obedience on the other. Still it is instructive for us to follow the extraordinary way in which she adapted herself to the needs of different types of men and women.

In 1889 Swami Brahmananda had a strong desire for undertaking austerity in some remote and lonely spot and sought the opinion of the Mother who was then at Jayram-bati. She wrote to Balaram Babu, 'I hear that Rakhal desires to go to the western parts. He suffered from cold at Puri last time. It will be better if he goes in February after winter. But if his desire is irresistible, then I have nothing to say.' That was enough for Swami Brahmananda who left in December.

Although Swami Vivekananda's mind was almost decided about going to the U.S.A. in 1893, he wanted to be absolutely free from doubt and so thought, 'Well, the Mother is none else than a part of the Master. Why should I not write a letter to her? I shall do as she asks me to.' With this idea he wrote to her asking for her blessing. The Mother was extremely happy to hear from her beloved son after such a long time. But this presented a problem also for her—should she endorse his plan? About Narendra's real stature she had indubitable proof from a vision she had at Kamarpukur after the Master's passing away. Still in the present context there was a conflict between affection and decision; though Narendra's future was undoubtedly bright, how could a mother permit her son to cross the ocean under the then existing uncertain conditions? When her mind oscillated thus between two alternatives, she saw one night in a dream, the Master walking

over the waves and beckoning Swami Vivekananda to follow him. This removed her misgivings, and she blessed the Swami's project whole-heartedly. The Swami, on his part, was elated on receipt of this letter and said, 'Hay-day, now is everything fixed up; the Mother, too, wished me to go.'

A few years after this, Swami Saradananda went to Jayarambati for seeking the Mother's benediction before starting for the U.S.A.' This time also there appeared before her the vision of the vast field of the Master's work: so she wiped her tears with one hand and with the other she blessed the Swami and said, 'The Master is protecting you for ever, my son; there's nothing to fear.'

When the Mother lived at the Bosepara Lane house in Calcutta, some time in 1898, Swami Brahmananda came there and in consultation with Swami Yogananda drafted a letter to be posted to Swami A. in America directing him in the Holy Mother's name on certain important personal matters of health and spirituality. Then it was sent to the Mother for her opinion. She heard it through and said, 'Tell Yogen (Yogananda) and Rakhal (Brahmananda) that the letter is well written and that my wishes have been correctly conveyed. It has my full approval.'

In May 1914, a devotee came to take Swami Premananda to Malda in connection with a celebration there. The Swami agreed subject to the Mother's consent. And so they both proceeded to the Mother at the 'Udbodhan'. The Mother disagreed, for the Swami was then in bad health and Malda was a far-off and out-of-the way place; besides, a festival was fraught with personal inconveniences. The Swami bowed down to her wishes, but the devotee was in a quandary. They had now to unsettle a settled fact which was by no means so easy. Hence he remonstrated with the Mother, who recalled the Swami and said, 'Well Baburam, they are so solicitous; should you then go?' The devout son replied, 'What do I know, Mother? It shall be as you order!'

1. The Swami left Calcutta in March 1896, and arrived in London on April 1.

At last she said, 'Go for a while; don't stay there for long.' The programme was fixed up accordingly.

Swami Shivananda was the manager of the Belur Math. Brahmachari Nagen (junior) did something awkward, because of which his friends warned him that he would be turned out of the Math by the Swami. Full of fear, the Brahmachari at once left for Jayrambati without any notice and without any change of clothes. When he reached the Mother's house with dirty clothes and haggard looks, none could imagine that he belonged to the Belur Math. After he had revealed his identity, the Mother gave him two pieces of cloth and a wrapper and had a letter written to Swami Shivananda to the effect: 'My dear son Tarak, the Junior Nagen has offended you in some way. Being afraid that you will turn him out of the Math, he has come to me covering the whole way on foot. As to that, my boy, can a mother mind her son's offence? Don't, my boy, take any action against him.' She kept Nagen with her till the reply came. By the return of post the reply came, 'We are freed from anxiety learning that younger Nagen is at your place. We had been searching for him. Kindly send him over here; there is a dearth of hands here for the worship. I shall not take any steps against him.' On receipt of the letter, Nagen went with the Mother's permission to Badanganj with Prabodh Babu who gave him a couple of shirts and railway fare up to Belur. When he arrived there, Swami Shivananda held him fast in an embrace and said, 'How now, my boy! You went to the High Court to complain against me?'

In 1912, when the Mother was in Banaras, there came a woman who related to her the poverty she was suffering from and then requested her to arrange for some monetary help from the local Ramakrishna Mission centre. The Mother answered, 'I may tell them and try. But, my daughter, all their collection is from begging. And there's no counting what a lot of people they are helping. They have to disburse what they have as they think best.'

On the one hand there was this freedom, and on the other there was a strict regulation of it. Once it was decided to dismiss the cook at the 'Unbodhan'; but the manger was shilly-shallying on the plea that this would inconvenience the Mother. Hearing of this the Mother said, 'You are monks whose one aim is renunciation; can't you get rid of a servant?' Again when the Mother came to know that a monk at the Belur Math had slapped a servant for disobedience, she commented, 'They are (homeless) monks who should live under trees. And to think that they have their Math, their house, their servant and the beating of that servant to boot!'

Though such rare occasions evoked a few caustic remarks from her, love for the monks was a dominant note of all her dealings with them. One of the Brahmacharis used to go from Belur to Calcutta in passing boats during ebb tide for marketing at Burrabazar and would return by boat; otherwise he went to the 'Udbodhan' for midday meal. Owing to difficulties of communication and uncertainties of tide, he could not intimate his movements and often appeared at meal-time without notice. This irritated Golap-Ma. And one noon as he put in an appearance, she began castigating him loudly for his indiscipline. The Mother heard of this and, coming out to the verandah from her room, said to Golap-Ma, 'Now the Master's family is daily on the increase; and one or two like these are to be expected as a matter of course. Can you help that?' Golap-Ma still argued, 'He comes just when he likes and without any notice whatever.' The Mother said, 'Howsoever that may be, you are now to serve him food without delay, it is already late; my son has come after much rummaging.' Golap-Ma twitted her by saying, 'Why so much sympathy for him? Is he your father-in-law?' Nothing abashed, the Mother asserted, 'Yes, so it is. They are my fathers-in-law, my all.'

About a fortnight before the worship of Durga in 1919, four Brahmacharis walked from Belur Math to Jay-

Jayrambati and bowed down before the Mother. She inquired about her sons at Belur and wanted to know if the Brahmacharis had come with the permission of Swami Saradananda. They replied, 'No, Mother. In the afternoon before yesterday, as we walked out of the Math precincts and came in sight of the Grand Trunk Road, one of us said, "One can reach Banaras if one walks along this road." No sooner did he say so than the determination came to us, "Well then, let us not return to the Math and right away proceed along this road to Banaras." And thus we didn't return to the Math, or send any intimation of our action but walked along for some distance, when it struck us that since we had been walking to Banaras, it would be in the fitness of things to come to Jayrambati to take the monastic vow from you and then undertake austerity at Banaras for sometime by living on alms. That's why we have come to you.' The narration over, the Mother looked pensive for a while and then said slowly, 'Listen, my boys, it's my wish that you now return to the Math. The Durga worship will come off a few days hence. They will be in great difficulty about the various works. It was not proper for you to have come without telling Tarak (Shivananda). And you have come in this season (of malaria) without so much as informing Sarat (Saradananda). Had you told Sarat, he would not have allowed you to come.' And she added, 'Is it any less austerity to live at the Math? You have joined the Math only recently; you should live with them for some time; then everything will come slowly in due course.' The Brahmacharis were not dissuaded, but they rather kept on supplicating her for Sannyasa. Moreover, their leader asserted that they would perform austerity for a long time at Banaras with the determination of a Buddha 'to achieve the end or end the body'. The Mother was embarrassed by their doggedness, but she could not be cruel. She granted the ochre cloth to only one of them. Brahmachari Bholanath, the youngest of the group, had been introduced by her to the Belur Math, and so she was

at pains to see at least this boy return to the Math; but fidelity to the group dragged him also to Banaras.

In the meantime, Swami Shivananda guessed that the Brahmacharis had gone to Jayrambati, and he appraised the Mother of the whole situation by a letter. In answer, the Mother also informed him of all that had happened at her place. Swami Shivananda now wrote to Chandra Maharaj (Swami Nirbharananda), head of the Advaita Ashrama of Banaras not to shelter these insubordinate Brahmacharis who had defied all including the Mother. This order was followed by all concerned, except Bholanath (afterwards Swami Amareshananda) who found himself stranded and prayed for the Mother's indulgence to permit him to stay at the Advaita Ashrama. Bholanath's letter moved the Mother and she said, 'Alas, he has become a prey to his group! Now he realizes how painful it is. Anyway, let us write to Chandra so that he may find refuge in the (Advaita) Ashrama itself.' And to Bholanath she wrote, 'I have written to Chandra about you; and to you I say, now that you are at Banaras, if you can live in the Master's Ashrama serving Chandra and the other monks for life, it will be to your own good.' A similar message was communicated to Swami Shivananda, who obeyed the decision unquestioningly. Bholanath fulfilled the Mother's expectation by spending the rest of his life at the Advaita Ashrama, where he breathed his last on February 4, 1948.

We now come to deal with the preservation of the Master's birth-place and arrangements for a temple to be built on it, in settling which questions the Mother had an important part to play. When she was at the 'Udbodhan' for the last time, the Master's nephew and niece, Ramlal and Lakshmi Devi, and Ramlal's daughter came to see her on their way to Entally where they were going to attend the birthday celebration of the Master. In the course of conversation they adverted to the question of the Master's birth-place and the proposed temple on it. Lakshmi Devi wanted to know, 'When that (temple) is constructed, will

it be in our keeping, and will their (Ramlal's and Shivaram's) children themselves carry on the worship etc., and live there? ' The Mother replied, ' How can that be? These are monks and devotees. Do they observe caste regulations? Innumerable people, and many foreigners from diverse countries will be going and living there and partaking of the *prasada*. We have to deal with all sorts of devotees, whereas you are householders; you have your society, your marriages for your children. How can you live with them? ' The conversation proceeded in this way, and the Mother suggested that the monks of the Belur Math should take charge of the birth-place as also of the future temple, and that they should build houses with roofings of corrugated iron sheets for Ramlal and others, and a permanent brick temple for the family deities, Raghuvir and Sitala, whose worship, however, should continue to be entrusted to the family itself. But she also emphasized that Ramlal, Shivaram, and Lakshmi should live in the temple precincts and partake of the *prasada* from there whenever they chanced to stay at Kamarpukur. All present endorsed the Mother's proposals heartily and Swami Saradananda, too, was pleased to hear of this arrangement.¹

We have already referred to the arrangement made with regard to the Mother's birth-place and the trust deed registered in favour of Jagad-dhatri. According to the Mother's wishes and the relevant deeds, the trustees of the Belur Math are the absolute managers of all these properties.

1. In accordance with this settlement, the birth-place was handed over to the trustees of the Belur Math, by a document dated the 27th of July, 1918, which was signed by the Holy Mother and others. A little earlier, on December 14, 1917, a small piece of land contiguous to the birth-place was secured by the trustees. The construction of the temple began only after the acquisition of the Master's house on July 16, 1946. The stone temple built on the birth-place was dedicated on May 11, 1951. The trustees have built a permanent structure for the family deities, and have paid adequate sums to the descendants of Ramlal and Shivaram towards the cost of their separate houses.

27

MOTHER

Finding the Mother engaged in cleaning the orts, sister Nalini, caste-ridden as she was, cried out in horror, 'Ah me! She's removing the leavings of a multitude of castes!' To this the Mother retorted, 'What if they are from various castes? They are all my children.' How could differences have any significance in her eyes who looked upon all as her children? That all-comprehending affection embraced all people—high and low, rich and poor, brahmin and non-brahmin.

The daily removal of orts was a part of the daily routine of the Mother. She would not allow the devotees to do this, assuring them that there was no lack of hands for the purpose; and then behind their backs she herself would undertake it. One day at Jayrambati, Swami Vishweshwarananda was on the point of carrying away his plate after meal when the Mother stopped him and took it away herself. The monk protested, 'Why should you carry it? I shall do it.' But the Mother said sweetly and persuasively, 'What indeed have I done for you? A child even soils its mother's lap and does so many other things? You are rare jewels to be sought for by gods.' The other women who lived with the Mother never did such a thing; on the contrary they argued, 'You are born in a brahmin family, and are a guru to boot, while these are your disciples. Why do you remove their leavings? That may bring evil on them.' The Mother answered in her own artless manner: 'Well, I am their mother. If a mother shouldn't do it all for her children's sake who else should?'

A devotee of the yogi (weaver) caste felt some hesitation in moving about freely in the Mother's house. The Mother said to him one day, 'Do you hesitate just because you are a ougi? What of that, my son? You belong to the master's fold—you are of his family, and you have

come here.' She further explained that the very fact of her not inquiring about his caste at the time of initiation showed that he just belonged to the Mother's home; and that though rural societies were caste-ridden, nobody would raise any question at Jayarambati, nor need he be fussy about it at all.

At one time during the second day of the Durga worship, which is considered specially holy, the devotees were offering flowers at her feet after entering her room. One man, however, stood aloof. The Mother learnt from inquiry that he came from Tajpur; and though he belonged to the lowly Bagdi caste, she asked him to offer flowers just as the others had done. The man complied cheerfully.

When any devotee came to the Mother, she removed his hesitancy in the twinkling of an eye—so powerful was her motherly affection. Brahmachari Rashbihari lost his mother in his childhood, and not being used to call anyone mother, he felt shy in uttering the word. One day, as the Mother wanted to send a message through him to a cousin she wanted to be sure of his having grasped her meaning and so asked him, 'Will you repeat what you will say?' Rashbihari replied, 'She has directed me to say such and such things.' 'You will say, "The Mother has directed"', said she and laid sufficient emphasis on the word 'Mother' to impress it permanently on his mind.

The Mother was once lying ill at Koalpara and a Brahmachari lived at Jayarambati. As he was very indifferent about his food and other requirements, she called him to Koalpara and asked him to be more attentive to his physical needs. He was quite young then, and yet was reserved in his dealings with the Mother; moreover, his own health was bad and he feared that this might infect the Mother. Hence he stood at a distance while talking with the Mother. The Mother asked him to come closer; but even so he kept himself at a considerable distance. The Mother, therefore, chastised him saying, 'What's that! Feel my body to see how I am.' The Brahmachari then

sat by her and the Mother talked to him tenderly. At that time they used to send milk for her from Jayrambati. She said, 'Sufficient milk is available here; don't send any more milk, but you yourself should drink it plentifully.'

In fact, the relationship between the Mother and her sons seemed divinely regulated, and its expression was truly wonderful. There was the same depth and intimacy as in ordinary relationships without their concomitant bondage or attachment. There were tears and smiles, as also unruffled placidity. Sri Dwarakanath Mazumdar got his *mantra* at Jayrambati and on his way home fell ill with dysentery at Koalpara, to which he succumbed calling on the Master with folded hands to the last moment. When the news reached the Mother, she wept bitterly like any bereaved mother and said, 'A jewel of a son of mine is gone. Alas! This was my son's last birth.' She would not call her sons by their monastic names, saying by way of explanation, 'It's just because I am the mother, it hurts me to call them by their Sannyasa names.' Sannyasa means separation from all, including parents; and the Mother could not entertain that idea even in thought. Noticing this, Swami Vishweshwarananda once asked her, 'How do you look upon us?' 'As Narayana,' replied the Mother. 'We are your sons;' argued the inquirer, 'if you consider us as Narayana, you can no longer think of us as your sons.' 'I look upon you as Narayana, and as sons also,' said the Mother. As in this synthesis, the Mother's conception of sonship consists in a fusion of the human and the divine, so also in another case we get a harmonization of the finite and the infinite in her conception of motherhood. A devotee asked one day, 'I call you mother; but I want to know if you are my mother as a matter of fact.' 'If I am not your real mother,' answered the Mother, 'what else am I? I am really the mother.' 'You may say so,' argued the unconvinced devotee, 'but I don't fully understand. Why don't I have the same genuine feeling of motherhood towards you, as I have spontaneously toward my own

mother?' The Mother first deplored saying, 'Alas, what a pity!' And then she added, 'The same entity is the parent of all, my child, the same has taken shape as fathers and mothers.' It is perhaps sad that the truth did not dawn on the devotee, but that was no reason why her own universal Motherhood should not be clear as daylight to herself. The Mother that was in her, 'the divinity that manifests itself as mothers among all beings' (*Chandi*), satisfied in the forms of the finite mothers the cravings for love in the hearts of finite beings. This infinite and all-embracing Motherhood of hers spoke so sweetly through every word, every movement and every act, that a mere touch of it melted the hardest heart.

Radhu had a pet cat for which the Mother provided half a pound of milk every day. She lay quietly and fearlessly at the Mother's feet; and even if for silencing others' complaints she feigned to drive it away with a stick, the cat took shelter, between her feet nevertheless, so that the Mother had to throw away the stick and smile, and the others too had to follow suit. Cats are given to stealing. But this did not annoy the Mother who said, 'To steal is their nature, my boy; who will feed them fondly?' But Brahmachari Jnan declared a war against the cat. One day, when he flung her away, the Mother looked pale with pain. Beating the cat also was a common occurrence. In spite of this dislike, the family of this cat throve through the care bestowed on it by Radhu and the Mother. And then came the time for the Mother's departure for Calcutta. The Mother called the Brahmachari to her and said, 'Jnan, you should cook rice for the cats, so that they may not have to go to other houses; for then people will abuse us, my boy.' This was a common argument, by which, the Mother knew, the lot of the cats might not improve overnight. And hence she added, 'Look here, Jnan, don't beat the cats; for even in them am I.' That was enough; the Brahmachari could no longer lift his hand against the cats. And he went so far

as to arrange for a regular supply of fish for them, although he himself was a strict vegetarian!

In one sense she was the Mother of all the devotees, and in another she herself was all; her infinite motherhood left none outside its all-comprehensive grasp. Brahmachari Rashbihari asked her one day, 'Are you the Mother of all?' 'Yes,' replied the Mother. 'Even of these lower creatures?' pressed the inquirer. 'Yes,' answered the Mother.

But the mother in her was not satisfied even with so many children. She was often heard calling in a low tone, 'Come to me here, my children.' When Swami Vishweshwarananda reached Jayrambati, the Mother said eagerly, 'So you have come, how fine! I have been calling you for the last few days—when calling Rajen I have been uttering your name.' The Mother was careful never to show her emotion; and that is why this anxiety could often find but partial expression. Yet the little that came out revealed a world of hidden feeling.

As Swami Maheshwarananda was returning to the Belur Math from the 'Udbodhan', the Mother gave him a rupee to be handed over to Swami Premananda, and said, 'This is to be spent for the Master's worship, and for offering *tulasi* (holy basil) leaves for the welfare of Sarat, by name.' Swami Saradananda was then down with fever.

The Mother once heard from Sri Prabhakar Mukherji of Arambagh that his son was suffering from measles. When the devotee was returning home from Jayrambati the Mother gave him a rupee, saying, 'Offer worship to Sitala at Kamarpukur on your way.' That was meant for invoking the goddess's grace for the boy.

Noticing Bibhutibhushan Ghosh eating lustily at the Mother's house at Jayrambati, his mother Rohinibala remarked, 'Bibhuti seems to eat here heartily; but at my place he eats only this much (indicating a small quantity with the fingers).' The Mother at once protested, 'Don't you be casting an evil eye on my son! I am a beggar; whatever I offer to my sons, they eat with avidity.'

In fact, in her words and manner there was such a genuineness and cordiality that a new-comer felt at once drawn to her. When a woman devotee came to the Mother at the 'Udbodhan' (February 1911) the Mother said, 'How are you? How is my daughter-in-law? You didn't come all these days, and I was wondering if you had fallen ill.' The devotee wondered how a single meeting for a few minutes could ripen into such intimacy. The matter did not, however, end there. With the greatest affection the Mother made her sit near her on the cot and said, 'It seems, my daughter, as though I have seen you many a time as though it's an acquaintance of long standing.' As the time for the devotee's returning home approached, the Mother brought her some *prasada* and holding it to her lips said, 'Eat.' The devotee felt rather shy, but the Mother said encouragingly, 'Why be so shy? Take it.' So the devotee took the food in her hands. When at last she bade adieu the Mother inquired, 'Will you be able to go down? Shall I accompany you?' And she went to the staircase to see her off. The same devotee came to the Mother in the summer of that year, tired and perspiring. The Mother said eagerly, 'Take off your blouse and let your body be cooled;' and as she spoke, she took down a fan and tried to comfort her. The more the devotee protested, 'Give me the fan, I shall move it myself' the more the Mother said with affection, 'Don't you mind that, don't; be a little cooled.'

The same devotee came in October 1912, and after partaking of the *prasada* at noon began fanning the Mother, who, however, said, 'Fetch a pillow from there and lie down by me. I don't require any more breeze.' Thinking it to be sacrilegious to use the Mother's pillow, the devotee no sooner fetched one from Radhu's room than the Mother laughed and said, 'That's the mad one's (Radhu's mother's) pillow, my dear; bring the other one; there's no harm in this.' And to Radhu she said, 'Radhu, you too come, and lie down by your sister.'

A woman devotee of the Vaidya caste was permitted to cook and bring from her home some dishes for the Mother. One day in August 1918, as she stepped in with those preparations, the Mother said, 'Look here, my dear, with how much trouble she has come with all these!' 'Why, it is you who want them! That's why they bring them,' ejaculated Nalini Devi, rather critically. 'Well,' asserted the Mother, 'why should I not ask what I want from them? They are my daughters.' The Mother was pleased on tasting those preparations that night; and even Nalini, so notoriously squeamish was forced to say, 'What wonder! Though I can't relish anybody's cooking, yet I don't feel any repulsion when eating her preparations?' At this the Mother said with pride, 'Why should you? For she is my daughter, to be sure.'

A young man sat in front of the Mother on the northern verandah of her room at the 'Udbodhan' and confessed, 'Mother, I've suffered quite a lot in the world. You are my guru, you are my chosen deity, I know nothing else. In truth I've committed so many wrongs, that I blush to speak of them even before you. And yet I continue to live by your grace.' The Mother caressed his head tenderly as she said solacing him, 'A son to a mother, a son!' That melted the man's heart and he said, 'Yes Mother! But may I never think that your grace is so cheap, just because I have got so much of it from you.'

Some devotees, after reaching the Koalpara Ashrama at sunset during the Janmashtami holidays (Krishna's birthday in August), 1913, decided to reach Jayrambati that very night. It was dark and it began to pour heavily on the way. When they reached Jayrambati, the Mother was not informed. Next morning as they saluted her, she reproached them saying, 'My sons, the Master has saved you. In that darkness, slush, and downpour, you must have trampled over many a snake. It pains me to see one walk in that way. It is no good walking recklessly.' The devotees tried to explain that their leave was short and

their desire to see her was great, and that these compelled them to be a bit rash.' The Mother still persisted, 'It's natural to be so on your part; but it pains me.' She recollected the incident two and a half years later, when the wife of one of these devotees arrived at the 'Udbodhan' (December 25, 1915). That day at about nine or ten in the morning, the Mother sat on the floor with some crisp-fried-rice and other fried things in the folds of her cloth, from which she took a handful now and then and also offered some to the new-comer saying, 'Take it, my daughter-in-law, take it.' That evening when the devotee came to take his wife home the Mother, alluding to the Jayrambati incident, said, 'It's not good to walk about recklessly.' The devotee assured her, 'No, I shall not do so any more.' The Mother understood this to mean that he would not go to Jayrambati, and so she quickly interposed, 'Why should you not go? My son, if a thorn pricks your foot, it hurts me like a spear entering my heart.' And turning to the devotee's wife, she said, 'Daughter-in-law, dear, you should keep a watch on him, so that he doesn't walk in this way.'

A baby who slept by the Mother's side at the 'Udbodhan' soiled her blanket. As the baby's mother proceeded to clean the blanket, the Mother snatched it from her and washed it herself. When the child's mother objected, 'Mother, why should you wash it?' the Mother replied briefly but feelingly, 'Why should I not? Is she (the baby) a stranger to me?'

The number of devotees is swelling. They come to the 'Udbodhan' at all hours of the day; their tastes differ and needs vary. The Mother has no rest, and inconveniences multiply. This enrages the outspoken Golap-Ma, who criticizes her saying, 'What's this that has come upon you, Mother? You put forward your feet to anyone who approaches you and calls you Mother!' The Mother pleads, 'How can I help it, Golap? I can't contain myself when one draws near me and calls me Mother.'

This affection of the Mother was not confined to devotees alone; it transcended the limits of all social and family barriers and submerged everybody in its resistless tidal rush. The Mother while dictating a letter to Sri Bholanath Chatterji, uncle-in-law of Radhu, said without the least hesitation, 'Write "My dear son".' 'How is that, my dear?' interrupted Radhu's mother. 'He is certainly related to you otherwise through Radhu.' Not the least abashed the Mother said, 'Let that alone; he loves to call me Mother, and I also am so to him.' Her sisters-in-law, Indumati Devi and Suvasini Devi, also addressed her as Mother.

The villagers, too, had a share of this overflowing love. Once, after the Mother's recovery from an illness, some people wanted to sacrifice a goat before Simhavahini; but the Mother offered *rasagollas* (juice-balls) worth some rupees. In the afternoon, no sooner was the bell rung twice from the Mother's house than the villagers, who had become trained in such matters by that time, flocked to the place and sat in rows on either side of the road. The monks served the *rasagollas* to them and the Mother looked on with a sweet smile on her lips.

The devotees had evidences of her motherly heart in every little detail of life, so much so, that they found no difference between her and their own mothers. At the very first contact she became acquainted with each one's taste and attended to him or her accordingly. Nalin Babu sat at meal at Jayrambati with about fifteen other devotees, and thinking all the while that the Mother was most attentive to his needs, felt a little uncomfortable. But on comparing notes with others after meal, he found to his surprise that they too had felt the same tender concern of the Mother for each of them.

At the time of distributing *prasada*, it was noticed that she gave each one the particular thing he liked most. The first one that came got the best that he could think of; similarly the second one, and so also the third. Everybody was satisfied that the Mother loved him the most.

And she fulfilled one's desire before one could open one's lips. The Mother was at her meal when a certain monk arrived at Jayrambati. It was his cherished idea to have the Mother's *prasada*, left from the Mother's own plate. But such was her habit that she sat for meal after feeding all her sons. So the monk had not got any opportunity so far. This time, as soon as he arrived, the Mother sent him some light refreshment and tobacco, for she knew that he smoked, and when she had finished her meal, she called him in and said, 'Sit down, my son. I have eaten from those leaves.' She had used *sal* leaves and all the eatables were there arranged properly.

The Mother treated all her sons with equal tenderness, for no man is entirely guiltless. Once a direct disciple of the Master was so offended with the conduct of a certain devotee that he requested the Mother not to allow him to get anywhere near her. But she replied, 'If my son wallows in the dust or mud, it is I who have to wipe all the dirt from off his body and take him to my lap.'

Hundreds of sufferers came to her with their burdens of sins and woes. Their touch often produced pain in her feet, but she bore this knowingly and willingly. One afternoon, when the visitors had left, Brahmachari Rashbihari saw the Mother washing her feet up to the knees again and again. When asked for the reason she said, 'Don't allow anyone any more to salute me by laying his head on my feet; thereby all the sins enter there, and my feet burn, so that I have to wash them. That's why I fall ill. Ask them to salute me from a distance.' But she changed her mood immediately saying, 'Don't tell these things to Sarat (Saradananda), for he will then stop salutation altogether.'

It was palpably evident to her that the touch of a sinner was painful; but though evident, how could she, a mother, refuse her own sons to touch her feet? Besides, she could not so much as see anybody's fault. One evening she said to Brahmachari Varada, 'When G. and

Others came to pay their respects to me this morning, they made certain reflections against A. and said that he had quarrelled with the monks at Rishikesh and was trying to give them trouble. And casting some more aspersions against him they added, "How could he have such an evil propensity after having lived with you and served you so long?" I can no longer see or listen to anyone's defect, my son. It shall be as each has earned in his past lives. If they were destined to have a deep wound, they must have at least the prick of a pin. They talked of A.'s fault to me! Where were they in those days? How serviceable he was to me! In those days I boiled paddy and did all kinds of work in my brother's family. He started working with me from the morning without caring for sun or rain, and with his body covered with soot he took down big vessels of paddy from the oven. Many are there now who come here as devotees; but whom had I then? Should we forget it all? And yet, mind you, people are not really to blame. Formerly, I also took notice of a lot of other people's drawbacks. Then, by praying for long to the Master with tearful eyes "Master, I can no more bear finding fault" could I at last get rid of the habit of picking holes in other people's clothes. When I was at Vrindaban, I used to visit Vankubihari (Krishna in a bent pose) and prayed to him, "Your form is bent, but Your mind is straight—kindly straighten the windings of my mind." Mark you, even though you might have a hundred times benefited a man and then happen to do him one wrong, he will take umbrage. People can easily discover others' defects but few can recognize merit. One should appreciate merit.'

An educated young man belonging to a well-to-do family of a neighbouring village had the good fortune of receiving initiation from the Mother. He used to come to her very often. Through his help an Ashrama was started in that village. But as ill luck would have it, he became involved in a love affair with a near relative who was a

widow from her early age. Now, scandals have wings; and the Jayrambati devotees came to know of this very soon. In their anger they appealed to the Mother to stop his coming to her house. The Mother was visibly moved at this lapse of her son; but to their request she replied, 'How can I, who am his mother, forbid him to come? Such words will never pass out of my lips.' The young man continued to come as usual. Not only this, he brought the girl also one day. The Mother reproached her for enticing her son and warned her for the future; but she was as unwaveringly affectionate with her as with any of her other daughters.

We allude to another incident which happened much earlier. The Mother then lived at the 10/2 Bosepara Lane house. A servant had been driven out by Swami Vivekananda for stealing. The man was poor and his family depended on him. Now he found himself in a most difficult position and ran to the Mother at the 'Udbodhan' for shelter. The Mother kept him there and fed him. That very afternoon, when Swami Premananda happened to go there to pay his respects to her, she said, 'Look here, Baburam, this man is very poor. He was impelled by his poverty to do as he did. Should Naren on that score scold him and drive him out? The world is full of misery. You are monks who realize very little of it. Take him back.' Swami Premananda tried to impress on her that this would displease Swami Vivekananda. The Mother then said with some emphasis, 'I say, take him.' As Swami Premananda entered the Math compound at dusk, Swami Vivekananda burst out, 'Look at Baburam's thoughtlessness; he has brought that fellow again!' Swami Premananda then explained everything, which silenced the great Swami.

As it became known that even rebellious minds bowed down before the might of her motherly love, the weaker parties defeated in life's struggles used to seek her intervention, and it was found that the stronger ones accepted with alacrity whatever decision she arrived at. One day as she was seated on a cot under a tamarind tree at Koal-

para, there came a woman of the sweeper caste who complained that her paramour had suddenly deserted her. She had been living with him after having cut off all her moorings, and now she was stranded. The woman wept bitterly as she related her tale of woe. The Mother was moved very much and sent for the sweeper and rebuked him gently and persuasively, saying, 'She came to you leaving everything behind; and you have accepted her services so long. If you desert her now, you will incur great sin, you won't find a place even in hell.' The man's heart was touched at these words, and he took the woman home.

The Mother's infinite love transcended all limitations of caste or colour, merit or demerit, in fact, of all conditions of life. Any one that took refuge in her, was treated kindly, helped with medicines and other necessities, and filled with sympathy. She consciously ignored people's frailties and foibles, and asked others also to do the same. The result was that even criminals behaved decently and sometimes changed their habits.

Mulberry was once widely cultivated and silk-worms reared in many villages of West Bengal. But foreign competition tolled the death-knell of this industry at the beginning of the present century, as a consequence of which many Mohammedan families at Shiromanipur were reduced to penury. No honest means of livelihood being open to them, the hapless Mohammedans took to stealing and robbery, which earned for them the appellation of 'mulberry-robbers' (*tunte'-dakat*). They were a terror to the neighbouring villages, including Jayrambati. Naturally, they were studiously shunned by the Hindus. And to add to the misery of these wretched families, a famine raged in those parts. Just then, the new house of the Mother was being built, and the monks who supervised the work engaged some of these famine-stricken people. The villagers did not take this kindly and often grumbled that the monks were courting trouble for themselves and the

villagers. Nonetheless they had to change their opinion soon and declare, 'Ah! By the Mother's grace, the robbers too, are becoming devotees!' How this happened can be realized from the following few anecdotes.

One day, one of these 'mulberry-robbers' brought some plantains to the Mother and said, 'Mother, here are some plantains for the Master; will you accept them?' The Holy Mother stretched out her hands for acceptance and said, 'Certainly I will, my dear; hand them over. Why should I not, since you have brought them for the Master?' A woman devotee who hailed from a neighbouring village and happened to be there, was taken aback by this strange behaviour of the Mother, and she said warningly, 'These are thieves, you know. Why should his things be offered to the Master?' The Mother, apparently unperturbed by this rude interference, deposited the fruits in the store and ordered some fried-rice and sweets for the man. When he had gone, she turned to the woman and administered a stern rebuke, 'I know who is good and who is not.' Her mission was to uplift the spiritually fallen, and she used to say, 'To err is human; but how few know, how to lead an erring man?'

Amzad was one of those 'mulberry-robbers' who had a hand in erecting the mud walls of the Mother's house. One day the Mother seated him on her verandah for his meal. Nalini Devi served him, but owing to caste prejudices she stood at a distance on the courtyard and tossed the food on to the man's leaf-plate. This displeased the Mother, who said, 'Can one have any relish for food if it is served in such a fashion? If you can't serve him properly, I shall do it.' When Amzad had finished his meal, the Mother cleansed the place herself. At this, Nalini Devi loudly denounced the act saying, 'O dear aunt, you lose your caste thereby!' But the Mother cut her short, 'Amzad is as truly my son as my Sarat (Saradananda) himself is.'

The next incident followed soon after. The Mother was down with fever, and many visited her in her sick-bed.

One morning, at about nine or ten o'clock, the Brahmachari on attendance saw a Mohammedan of dark appearance, emaciated body, ragged clothes, and sad looks, tottering into Mother's compound with the help of a staff. From his unhesitating movements it was apparent that the man, though unknown to the Brahmachari, was quite a familiar figure there. But curiosity urged him to follow the man. The Mother was inside, lying on a cot in her room, and the verandah in front was covered by a thin screen of plaited bamboo slips, so that the cot was not easily visible. The man tiptoed to look over the screen. Suddenly the Mother's eyes turned in that direction, and she accosted him in a low endearing voice, 'Is that you, dear Amzad? Come in.' With beaming eyes and a happy countenance Amzad stepped on to the verandah and standing on one side of the door thrust in his head to enter into an intimate conversation on matters of everyday life. Finding the Mother and her son thus engaged, the Brahmachari went about his own duties.

Not long after, the Brahmachari was called in to offer food to the Master. The Mother herself used to do this when she was well; but now she could not move about, and so the Brahmachari had to undertake this ceremony, which, however, was a very simple one. In the Mother's room, under the Master's seat, was kept some Ganges water which had to be poured into a small ceremonial vessel, technically called *panchapatra* and with this water the food in the kitchen had to be sanctified for being offered to the Master. The Brahmachari came to take the *panchapatra* but was in a dilemma finding the Mohammedan standing in the only doorway. He could not be told to move away, lest this should offend the Mother. At the same time, to pass closely by a Mohammedan, with the holy water in hand militated against caste prejudices and conventions ingrained from childhood in this Brahmachari who was a brahmin by birth. He hesitated for a moment and then decided to carry out his duty without minding the man's presence.

depending on the Mother to dissuade him if there was anything wrong in his move. He took the *panchapatra* and stepped out. After the offering he returned with it and placed it where it was. Amzad was all the while at his post. The Mother noticed everything but said nothing. As Amzad was leaving, in the evening, the Brahmachari noticed that the man's face was lit up with a happy smile, and he was altogether a changed person. He had bathed and rubbed oil all over his rough skin; then he had a full meal; and now he chewed betel and areca-nut as he walked home. In his hand was a phial of indigenous medicine, and in his bag were many titbits. The Mother told the Brahmachari, 'Amzad's brain has become heated as a result of taking stimulants. He has no sleep at night. I had with me for a long time a phial of Narayana oil, which I have given him. By using it his brain will be cooled; it is a very efficacious oil;'. Amzad soon recovered from his illness and was always at the Mother's service. If anything had to be done, the moment word was sent to him, he would faithfully carry it out. For instance, when the Mother lost her appetite as a result of protracted fever, her physician recommended pineapples, which were by no means easily available in those parts and in that season. So Amzad's services were requisitioned, and he soon brought the pineapples, as if by magic.

But in spite of this divine affection of the Mother, Amzad could not free himself wholly from the habit of thieving and robbing; and so the people of Jayrambati were afraid of him, though, as a matter of fact, that village remained free from the attention of those 'mulberry-robbers', evidently through Amzad's good offices. Often enough he was in jail, when his wife would run for help to the Mother who would give her whatever lay at hand. This love was heartily reciprocated by Amzad. Once after his release from jail, he found on returning home a number of gourds hanging down from his thatch. He plucked some of them and proceeded to Jayrambati. The Mother, delighted

to see him, said, 'I have been anxious because of your long absence. Where were you?' Amzad explained that he had been arrested on a charge of cattle-lifting, and so he could not visit her. Unmindful of the explanation, the Mother said with a sigh. 'Ah me! I have been really worried.'

When the Holy Mother was in Calcutta during her last illness, the news reached her that Amzad had been apprehended on a charge of robbery after having absconded for some time. At this information she said, 'Ah me! Look here, my dear, I knew that he was an adept in robbery.' It is said that after the passing away of the Mother, Amzad received a cut from a sword in an act of plundering. This wound developed into a sore and ultimately caused his death. The Mother knew this man's character well enough, and she also knew it to be her duty to protect her household and her village from people of his trade. But the method she adopted consciously through the promptings of her motherly heart was not only unique but also effective. It won the robber's heart and brought for her a result that even mightier people with ampler resources would have failed to achieve. She did not rely on arms or man-power, but on the power of love which softened the hardest criminal and which brooked no interference from caste, prejudice, or fear.

If we illustrate the Mother's life merely with citations from her relationship with cultured, intelligent, and affluent devotees, some may think, 'This is not very extraordinary.' Hence it is that we have dealt with Amzad a little elaborately. In support of our view, we shall continue to draw some more examples from common life.

Shortly after the construction of the Mother's house at Jayrambati, a devotee purchased a milch cow for her and arranged for its maintenance as well. At his cost, again, was engaged for tending the cow, a boy named Govinda (or Gobe), aged about eleven or twelve years. He was well-behaved and ever cheerful. But in a few days itches

spread over his whole body, defying treatment and causing pain. One night the pain became so excruciating that he had not a wink of sleep and wept all the while. Next morning the Mother sat on her verandah with a grinding stone on which she prepared a paste with green *neem* (margosa) leaves and turmeric, and making the boy stand before her asked him to apply it to the different parts of his body according to her direction. Govinda obeyed cheerfully and unhesitatingly as he would have done before his own mother; and this treatment cured him ultimately.

Haridas Vairagi of Desra used to sing, in accompaniment of his violin, religious songs which enkindled devotion in the hearts of his hearers, among whom he could count Girishchandra Ghosh, Swami Saradananda and others. But as he grew old, it became increasingly difficult for him to maintain himself. One day he came to the Mother's house a little before noon. The Mother gave him oil for rubbing over his rough skin before bath. When he returned after a dip in the tank, she gave him some fried-rice molasses and *prasada*. As he ate these, the Mother sat by him, talking on familiar things and preparing betel rolls. The First World War (1914-18) was raging at that time causing great scarcity of cloth. The old man said that he had no clothes. The Mother had spread in the sun after her morning ablution a new piece of cloth which she had worn but a couple of days. She got up at once and handed it over to the Vairagi. Haridas was overpowered with that evidence of the Mother's affection, and touching the cloth reverently to his head he bade her farewell with wet eyes.

We may mention in passing that this love of the Mother extended to dumb creatures as well. One day a calf was restlessly bleating, which made all infer that it had some pain in the stomach. The Mother, satisfied as she was with the little she had, was against multiplying the vexations of a household by purchasing cattle; and hence when the question was put to her, she gave her un-

willing consent with a view not to wound the feelings of the proposer, and then said to Brahmachari Gogan (Swami Ritananda), 'Mark you, what desire!'—as though she was witnessing from a distance, without any personal concern, the intricate workings of people's minds engrossed in worldly dealings. And when the cow came, she remarked, 'He has only left us in greater trouble by purchasing the cow.' Nonetheless, she meticulously supervised everything concerning it and its calf. The calf went on making an uneasy noise which set everybody at thinking and they tried various remedies without success. The bleating brought the Mother also there; she sat by the calf holding it in both arms and softly pressing its navel and patting it, as though it were her own child. A little later it calmed down and all returned to their respective places.

In the Mother's house there was a maina (a talking parrot) named Gangaram. The Mother herself daily washed the bird, gave it water and food, cleaned its cage, moved it from place to place and talked with it tenderly. Every morning and evening she went to him and said, 'Dear Gangaram, do talk!' The bird articulated, 'Hare Krishna, Hare Rama, Krishna, Krishna, Rama, Rama.' Hearing the names of the Brahmacharis from the Mother's lips, Gangaram learnt them well enough. And now and then it shrieked out, 'Mother, O Mother.' The Mother immediately responded with, 'Here I am, my son, here I am,' and she went to it with gram and water, for the bird's call meant that it was hungry. As far the Mother's love for cats, we have mentioned the fact before.

Now, we return to the devotees. In every word and movement, her motherliness was so strikingly evident that any one who happened to come within its orbit had some of his life's wants removed at once without any effort, Brahmachari Rashbihari, having lost his mother as a child, felt an inexpressible void in the deep recesses of his heart. Other children called on their mothers affectionately and had their feelings reciprocated; but he had none to turn

to. When as a young man he came to the Mother, he felt as though she had been waiting there all the time with a heart full to the brim with affection for him. A little touch of it changed his whole life.

Cases were not rare when young boys, coming to her, found her features exactly like those of their own mothers. True it is that this was not a matter of daily occurrence with them; but the first, and might be, the single vision spread a lasting influence over the whole of a man's life. When Swami Mahadevananda saw the Mother at Jayarambati he thought that his own mother was seated in front of him. Sri Panchanan Ghosh once went to see the Mother in his boyhood. As he was entering the Mother's room for saluting her, he chanced to look at her feet, which, to his utter amazement, were exactly like those of his mother; and the two hands on her lap with the golden bracelets resembled those of his mother who had then just been widowed. Past memories and present identity crowded over his mind to make him half-conscious. He drew slowly towards the Mother, step by step, urged by an unknown impulse. Once in front of the Mother, he looked again at her full figure, from the feet upwards to the face—all was exactly the same. The Mother noticed his emotional transformation and said affectionately, 'Why are you looking so, my son? What has happened to you, my dear? Come here, my boy, come.' Panchanan sat quite close by her and the Mother passed her affectionate hand over his back. That blissful touch made the boy's hair stand on end, and he felt as though he had met his own mother after a long interval.

A certain young devotee came, and finding the Mother none other than his own mother in every way, took it into his head like a child to sit for meal by her, and not stopping at that he said capriciously that he would not eat unless she fed him with her own hand. The Mother yielded to his importunity. Then he demanded that her veil must be removed before he could eat. Again she complied and

also talked with him about his family in the most endearing way. Such an occurrence was not rare. We have related earlier how Nag Mahashaya was fed.

When Swami Prashantananda saw the Mother's picture after the death of his own mother, he came to believe that there was an identity between the two. And hence he behaved towards the Mother accordingly when he first met her at Jayrambati. At that time he was a mere boy, and a doctor used to come on horseback to the Mother's place every day. Prashantananda began clamouring for a ride on that horse which was a naughty one, and, therefore, the Mother demurred. But Prashantananda's importunity compelled her to take the doctor's permission, which being readily given, Prashantananda sat astride the horse. But to control a naughty animal was no job for a stripling. No sooner was he in the saddle than the horse bolted homeward. At long last when he returned with the animal to the Mother his cloth was found torn and his body bleeding from scratches received while dashing past thorny trees and bamboo groves. The Mother was looking out all the while in great consternation; and when this wilful child returned she chid him and brought out for him a new piece of cloth.

Though the relationship between the Mother and her devotees was regulated by affection, yet the indiscretion of some devotees made it very often taxing, nay, even painful, to the Mother, who, however, bore it all in silence without changing her mood towards the person concerned. A Brahmachari saw one day that two devotees who had come to Jayrambati, were going to the Mother to worship her with water, flowers, *bel* leaves, etc. The Brahmachari forbade them to pour water or offer *bel* leaves on her feet since her legs were rheumatic and she had just recovered from an illness; besides, she did not like *bel* or *tulasi* leaves being offered at her feet as these were sacred to Siva and Vishnu respectively. The devotees treated his warning lightly and proceeded to do as they had planned.

At this the Brahmachari was forced to stop them rudely; but then he was afraid that the Mother had taken it amiss. She, however, told him afterwards, 'You should be near me and keep an eye on everything. At the "Udbodhan" they save me carefully from trouble in so many ways.'

We shall relate an incident in 1909, when Swami Saradananda was at Jayrambati. A young man turned up one day to see the Mother. The Brahmachari who had accompanied the Swami conducted the young man to the Mother. The stranger saluted her and then began pulling her legs under the foolish impulse of holding her feet on to his chest. Fortunately she then stood holding a post of the cottage and so did not fall down. The Brahmachari quickly took hold of the crazy man and led him out. When Swami Saradananda heard the whole affair he remarked. 'Yogin Maharaj (Swami Yogananda) never bowed down to the Mother while she was in a standing position; when she left, he took the dust from the place and put it on his head.'

Such queer behaviour was not confined to that remote past. Subsequently, too, some devotee might come to Jayrambati and demand immediate interview defying all persuasion to wait for the Mother's convenience. She had therefore to come out and stand on a low wooden stool like an image to accept the devotee's floral offering after which she had to hurry back to the kitchen to cook some food for that inconsiderate man himself.

A devotee expressed a desire that since he would be leaving for home in three or four days, he would like to have some rice from the Mother's plate, dry it and carry it home as her *prasada*. In due time the Mother showed him the rice *prasada* and said, 'That's yours, my dear.' The food was in a brass plate, and the devotee put it in the sun for drying. The Mother warned him, 'Mind you that the crows don't peck at it.' The devotees assured her that he would be returning immediately to watch it, and he went to the outer apartment for a smoke, in the course of

which he forgot everything and then fell asleep. When he woke up at three in the afternoon, he remembered the plate and hurried inside to find, to his utter confusion, the Mother still sitting by it. 'Didn't you have any rest today, Mother?', faltered the devotee. 'No, my son', replied she. 'I kept watching, lest that thing of yours should be pecked by crows.'

A woman, when taking leave of the Mother, bit her big toe. The Mother shrieked out in pain, 'Hello, my dear, what kind of a devotion is that! If she wants to bow down, let her do so; but instead, she holds my toe in her teeth!' 'It's just to make you remember', explained the woman. 'I never saw', said the Mother, 'such a device for making one remember.'

Some devotee might hold fast the Mother's feet and plead, 'Mother, do promise me that you will show yourself to me at least at the time of my death.' The Mother replied, 'Very well, I shall pray to the Master that he may vouchsafe his presence.' But the devotee still kept his firm grasp on her feet till at last the Mother found no means of escape but to say, 'Yes, my son, it shall be so.'

Brahmachari Varada had gone to a distant village to procure fuel. When he returned to Jayrambati at night-fall, he found the Mother lying on a mat in the verandah. As the Brahmachari approached her she said ruefully, 'You all are here; and yet you have to go out on business. To day there came a man, somewhat advanced in age. Seeing him from a distance, I entered the room and sat on my cot. He saluted me from outside and then became eager to take the dust of my feet. The more I said, "No, no," with modesty, the more he pressed. At last he took the dust almost by force. From that time I am suffering from a burning sensation in the feet and a pain in the stomach. I washed the feet three or four times, but still the pain and the burning sensation persist. If you had been nearby, you could have ascertained my wish and forbidden him. The strictness that they enforce in Calcutta with regard

to the devotees cannot wholly be dispensed with. You are too young to understand what diverse kinds of people come.'

The Mother was not entirely free from this kind of unwelcome visitors even in Calcutta. One day, as the Mother rose from her seat after finishing her worship a devotee came with some flowers to offer them at her feet. As the man was a stranger, she covered herself fully with a wrapper and sat on a cot with her feet hanging down. The devotee got his opportunity and began worshipping her to his heart's content with all the elaborate processes and *mantras* that the scriptures enjoin, unmindful of the fact that the Mother was perspiring all over, though she could not utter a word. It was nothing unusual to see a devotee offer flowers at her feet, and hence the ever watchful Golap-Ma was a little off her guard when she saw the man enter the room. Without due notice, she went away to attend to her own duties. But when returning after a long time, she found him still there, she became irritated at the man's silliness and said with her naturally loud voice, 'Are you here before a wooden image that you should invoke her with all your ceremonies (with their meditation on letters¹ and control of breath)? Don't you see that the Mother is sweating uncomfortably?' And she sent the man out.

It was at the 'Udbodhan', again, that a devotee, while bowing down to the Mother, struck his head so hard against her big toe that she had to utter a cry of pain. The others present there asked the man, 'What's this that you have done?' The man replied, 'By thus saluting the Mother I leave her with some pain in the feet, and she will remember me as long as the pain is there.' The Mother used to regale her attendants with such funny stories when they massaged her rheumatic legs with oil.

1. An image has to be awakened by establishing mentally its identity with the worshipper through certain processes, one of which is Nyasa consisting partly in thinking that the different limbs of the Deity are composed of various letters of the alphabet; She being thus none other than an embodiment of

At times, the Mother was so unbearably uncomfortable that, notwithstanding her forbearance, she could not but give vent occasionally to her irksomeness to the Master or the faithful attendants. One morning some well-dressed gentlemen came from Calcutta with some fruits, which through negligence had become rotten and so created a problem for the Mother as to how and where they were to be placed. They had forgotten to bring their towels with them; and as the ordinary ones which the Mother's household could boast of could not be offered to these genteel people, she had to search a long time for some presentable ones. And, then, it transpired that they had brought no strings for their mosquito nets, and so Brahmachari Hari had to run about for procuring some. Hard put to it, the Mother was heard soliloquizing. 'How pestered I am by all these people! I am fed up with it all. Some of the boys come and my household seems to be filled with peace; I have nothing to worry about. They eat without murmur whatever comes to hand and then get up taking along with them the leaves on which they eat. And look at these others! I am all agog from the morning. And now the problem is, what curry should be cooked for the night? Master, do you mind your own family. I am no longer able to cope with this. Radhu is trouble enough and here are these others in the bargain.'

Are such reactions indicative either of a disgust mixed with affection or of demonstration before the attendants of the difference between two types of devotion, the one which delights in show and reveals its ineptitude at every turn and the other which though quiet and undemonstrative, yet consists in pure love mixed with faith? Before we arrive at any conclusion let us deal with some more incidents of a similar type. Apropos of this, we may say that under similar circumstances, the Master's attitude also differed in accordance with the mental states of the

knowledge as expressible in thought and words, or in other words identical with consciousness as embodied in human beings.

devotees. Moreover, those who are not fully acquainted with the Jayrambati life of the Mother, will not realize how the Mother, who was adored on the one hand as the Universal Mother by many and who directed the destinies of innumerable others, had yet to court untold physical labour and undergo mental worries, even in her old age, all for the sake of making others contented. And in particular, we have to remember that the incident cited last happened at a time when the passing away of the Mother was not far away, and when she dropped hints off and on about that sad day. It is not difficult for any intelligent reader to see that, though the above soliloquy apparently expresses her vexation, yet below the surface is the covert forewarning of her impending departure. In the chapters 'Radhu' and 'In A Domestic Setting', we have seen how she had been praying to the Master for release from her earthly mission. The concluding sentences of the above soliloquy only underline that sentiment.

Almost contemporaneously with the above incident, one day, in early winter, a devotee came to Jayrambati with his wife and four daughters. They had started from Garbeta the previous afternoon, by bullock-carts, and after having reached Jibta in the morning, had walked to the Mother's home, a distance of a mile and a half, with the help of a guide. All the children were very young and one was a suckling baby suffering from malaria. The devotee became perplexed in the new place under such circumstances, and extremely worried that he might be causing difficulties to the Mother. She, however, welcomed them with such love and care that they got over their hesitation in a trice, the wife of the devotee began to behave as freely as if she were in her father's house. With deft hands the Mother made all possible arrangements for them in her little home, and even the baby had its milk and a place to lie down in. At the time of bathing, the devotee's wife went to the tank with other women of the household and returned with a pitcher of water at her waist. The couple

were initiated by the Mother after the morning worship. The party had to go to Talit in the Burdwan district, a long way from Garbeta which it takes three nights to cover. So they started on their journey after their midday meal and a nominal rest at Jayrambati. At the time of departure they, as also the Mother, shed tears, and the Mother called on goddess Durga for their safety on the way; and then stood at the place looking out after them till they went out of sight. Then she went inside and sat on Nalini Devi's verandah, saying regretfully that, though her children had come from a distance facing all the troubles of the journey, they had to leave quickly without rest, or even a little hearty talk, or any good food. Just then somebody saw a bath towel left there by mistake. The Mother said with sorrow, 'It's so natural to forget! They couldn't stay even for a night, and didn't have a chat—does the mind want to go away like this? And so mistakes are inevitable.' Seeing the Mother sad, Brahmachari Gopesh suggested that as the devotees could not have gone far, he could catch them up and give them the towel by walking fast after them. He did so with the Mother's consent. But on returning he found a second problem had cropped up. A woman of the household had found a cloth-piece of the devotee's wife-drying in the sun on the tank behind. She brought it in and then went on cutting jokes at the expense of the forgetful wife. A childless woman joined in the joke saying, 'which one should she take care of—so many are her brood!' The Mother saw the cloth piece and heard the pungent remark; but she said with a heavy sigh, 'Dear me! My child will be missing her cloth tomorrow after bath; when she will be searching for it she will recollect, "I left it at the Mother's house."' Gopesh volunteered to go with the cloth once again, but Nalini Devi disapproved of the idea. The Mother, however, seemed pleased at the idea. So he walked up to Jibta, and caught up with the party just as the carts were starting.

There came a group of devotees from Mymensing, of whom the leader was an initiated disciple of the Mother.

As he was in indifferent health and knew that the party's long stay at Jayrampati would inconvenience the Mother, he decided to leave for home soon after visiting the Master's house at Kamarpukur. But as ill luck would have it, he fell ill at Jayarambati just after the Kamarpukur visit. The Mother's attendants concluded that they should send him by a palanquin to Koalpara to ensure better medical care and to free the Mother's house from an avoidable encumbrance. The Mother was informed after the plan had taken shape. She heard all this without a word, creating thereby the unmistakable impression that though she disliked the idea she would not stand in their way. She had recently recovered from an illness, and was under strict regimen. She was given the juice of one pomegranate every day; but as the after-effects of the First World War had made these fruits difficult to procure, they were brought from Calcutta and kept in the custody of the attendants; for it was the habit of the Mother to give away anything that lay at hand. Today she had the desire to give one of the fruits to the ailing disciple. The attendants' protests went in vain; the disciple had the pomegranate and along with it all the good wishes of the Mother.

The plan was to carry away the patient after the midday meal. But Swami Vidyananda came with a palanquin a little before evening. There appeared at this time a small patch of black cloud in the sky; still the party for Koalpara started with the patient. Not long after, a thunder squall broke out. The Mother had been taking rest after the day's occupations. But the storm raging outside and the rain pouring in torrents startled her. She rushed out to the verandah helter-skelter and said, 'Ah me! What will happen to my child!' The attendant persuaded her to re-enter the room. There, again, she went on praying piteously, 'Master, do save my son.' As the storm abated, her ferment, too, was somewhat assuaged. But as the squall shrieked again with redoubled fury, the Mother, too, made for the verandah and prayed.

with a choked voice and tearful eyes, 'Prithee, Master, do be a little gracious, save my child.' The whole night passed in anxiety. Next day, when Vidyananda came to inform her that they had taken shelter in somebody's drawing room at Desra during the storm, so that they had no trouble whatsoever, then only was the Mother's heart composed.

Devotees came with diverse demands, and the Mother with her resourceful ministration and never-failing love, satisfied all these capricious children. Their childish whims were mostly in evidence at Jayrambati, where the Mother freed herself from all the unnatural restrictions of a cultured urban society, and the devotees found her more readily accessible than at the 'Udbodhan' where a strict vigilance was enforced. Many devotees, therefore, kept themselves informed of the Mother's movements and flocked to her village home when she happened to be there.

From the point of view of the Mother, there was a difference between Calcutta and Jayrambati. In Calcutta the monks and Golap-Ma and others had charge of household duties and of looking after the comforts of the devotees. Thus the Mother was not directly occupied with these duties. At Jayrambati on the contrary, everything rested on her. The devotees came to take *mantra* or see the Mother; but she had to keep a constant eye on all kinds of provision for their food, accommodation, conveniences, and necessities. This service of the devotees became something of a second nature with her. It might not have appeared as anything extraordinary; but we wonder how unassuming and diligent is the life of that unique personage who was none other than the Universal Mother, who was adored as such by thousands of devout people, and through whose mind and body was enkindled in the beginning of the twentieth century a mighty force which has addressed itself to the task of human regeneration and is calculated to be so occupied for ages. And how charming does that life become through a unique mixture of rural simplicity with unquestioning love! In the field of spirituality this is

altogether a rare phenomenon. Facts are indeed stranger than fiction.

The devotees came at odd hours, and that also without notice. Often enough they were strangers, though their dress and bearing revealed their culture and high social status. The villagers would look on them with amazement or hang on them with curiosity. But the Mother who was the centre of that mighty force that attracted all these high personages was oblivious of the commotion around her; and like the village girl that she was, she was ever engaged in various duties for them in and about her little cottage. Some of the new-comers were accustomed to taking tea soon after leaving bed, and so she would limp about with her rheumatic feet to get some milk from somebody's house whose cow may have been milked by then. Vegetables were not easy to procure in that hamlet. The little that she had collected from distant villages would sometimes run short because of the sudden influx of devotees. The Mother would go on searching from house to house for some more for immediate use. In the remote place nothing more could be had for refreshment than mere fried-rice and molasses. The Mother, therefore, would carefully stock semolina (soojee) with which she prepared *halva*. And after offering this prepartion in the morning to the Master together with some fruits, she would deal out the *prasada* in small cups for the breakfast of her children. Whenever her stock was exhausted she would hand over to them cupfuls of fried rice, cucumber, and molasses. The cultured devotee would protest, 'What's this stuff that you give me to eat, Mother; I amn't used to it.' The Mother would persuade him saying, 'Nothing else is available here, my son, this is all that can be had. Do eat this, it won't do you any harm. I shall feed you more nicely when I go go Calcutta.' The devotees from East Bengal were used to eating fish which, however, was difficult to obtain at Jayrambati. Still there would be no end to the Mother's effort. If she could not procure it, she would feel sad and say, 'I could not

feed my child well.' And though she was ever busy in this way, there was no disgust, rather she would say to her sisters-in-law with pride, 'Hullo, my dear, I have no trouble on account of my children. Even though a hundred of my children should come, I can tackle them all single-handed.'

Her motherliness defied all limitations of caste, country and community. Even during the days of the boycott of foreign goods (1905-11) when people's prejudices against the Britishers ran high, the Mother was heard to say, 'They too are my children, to be sure.' The authorities of the Kankurgachhi Yogodyana once invited her to visit the place during the Janmashtami celebration and she gladly agreed. But someone who had taken some umbrage against the people there, did not like the idea and told the Mother so. At this she said, 'It's your quarrel, my dear; but am I not their mother also?' A doctor's wife prayed after saluting the Mother, 'Mother, kindly bless me so that your son (my husband) may have a good practice.' The Mother gave her a straight look and said sternly, 'My dear daughter-in-law, to think that I should pronounce such a benediction,—that people should fall sick, that they should suffer! Well, dear, I can never do that. Let all be well, let the world prosper.' When saluting the Mother of the Universe after bathing, the Mother could be heard to pray, 'Dear Mother of the Universe, do grant happiness to the world.' The mad aunt was full of abuse for the Mother who, however, totally ignored her vagaries. But one day the aunt happened to say, 'Thou ruiner of all!' The Mother at once warned her, 'Whatever else you may call me, don't you call me ruiner of all. My children are spread all over the world; such a curse will be harmful to them.' We have come across many an incident illustrative of this all-comprehensiveness of her Motherliness so far as people of this country are concerned. Let us now turn to a few foreign devotees.

At Jayrambati, in 1906, she said to the young Brahmachari Girija, 'Mark you! The Master entered into spiritual

trance very often. One day, as he came down from a long *samadhi*, he said, "Listen, my dear, I went to a land where the people are all white. Ah! How sincere is their devotion!" Could I imagine then that these—Ole Bull¹ and others—would become devotees? I was at a loss to think who these white persons could be.' It might have been incomprehensible to a girl brought up in an inaccessible village amidst rural simplicity and ignorance; but her all-comprehending motherliness, liberal outlook, and stately courtesy soon elevated her to a level where distances and colours were obliterated, yielding place to only an unquenchable affection.

Though a brahmin widow, she could mix freely with the foreigners, even to the extent of eating with them. Swami Vivekananda writes in his letter of March 1898, "Shri Mother is here, and the European and American ladies went the other day to see her, and what do you think, Mother ate with them even there! Is not that grand?"

When Sister Nivedita returned from her Kashmir tour, she 'insisted on being the guest of women' so that she might become a part and parcel of Indian society, thereby becoming a fit instrument for the uplift of the country. This was no easy problem for Swami Vivekananda to solve. But the Holy Mother promptly came to his rescue. Nivedita was accepted as a daughter and accommodated in the Holy Mother's House in Calcutta.² Whenever Nivedita came to the Holy Mother, the Mother seated her by her side and there was no bar to the exchange of genuine feelings which create their own vehicles of communication. One day, when Nivedita came and sat by the Mother, the latter presented to her a woollen fan and said, 'I made this for you.' The gift delighted Nivedita so much that she sometimes touched it with her head, sometimes held it

1. She was a disciple of Swami Vivekananda and helped him in his work in various ways. She was very much attached to the Mother.

2. *The Master as I Saw Him*, VII Edn., p. 143.

to her bosom, and said, 'How fine, how charming!' Her happiness made the Mother say, 'Do you see how glad she is at getting that insignificant thing. Ah! How simple is her faith, as though a veritable goddess! How devoted she is to Naren (Vivekananda)! She has come here after giving up everything and is working here just because Naren was born here. What a devotion for the guru and what a fondness for this land!' Sister Nivedita presented to the Mother a nickel case, in which she kept the Master's hair, and she used to say, 'Nivedita said, "Mother, we were Hindus in our previous birth. We are born over there, so that the Master's message may spread."'

The Mother carefully preserved the gifts she got from her children and said, 'After all, what's a thing worth by itself; it's the memory that counts.' We refer to a much later incident. When Rammay (Gaurishwarananda) was taking out the clothes from the Mother's box for sunning them, he came across a fold—rotten wrapper of *endi* (Assam silk), and said, 'Mother, what's the need of keeping this one? It's all gone; let me throw it away. But the Mother said, 'No, my son; it was given me by Nivedita with great love; let it be there.' With these words she took the wrapper in hand, inserted black cumin seeds in its folds as a preservative, laid it by carefully and said, 'The very sight of the cloth reminds me of Nivedita. What a wonderful girl she was, my dear! At first she could not talk with me, and the boys acted as interpreters. Later on she picked up the Bengali language. She loved my mother very much.'

When Sister Christine visited the Mother with Sudhira Devi of the Nivedita School, a few days after Nivedita's demise the Mother remembered the intimate friendship that Christine had with Nivedita and said to Sudhira Devi 'Alas! They two lived together. Now it will be so sad for her to live alone!' And to Christine she said, 'Considering how even our hearts feel so intensely for her, yours will do so all the more, my dear. What a personality she was!

And how many are now weeping for her!' And the Mother began shedding tears. Then she made Christine tell her many things about the School.

From the conduct of Miss MacLeod¹ one evening we can get a glimpse of the kind of absorption the Mother's love could bring about. That day Swami Nirbhayananda had escorted her in a boat from the Belur Math to the 'Udbodhan.' When they returned, the evening service at the chapel was in progress. Miss MacLeod made her obeisance at the shrine, meditated for a while, and then started for her own quarters at the guest house of the Math. As it had become dark, Swami Dhirananda asked a Brahmachari to accompany her with a lantern. Miss MacLeod had already advanced a few steps ahead. When the Brahmachari drew near her, she was heard repeating to herself, 'I've seen her, I've seen her.' Suddenly she was aware of the Brahmachari's presence, and bringing her face to his ears she whispered with great emotion, 'The Holy Mother! I've seen her.' She covered a furlong in this mood of elation, hardly noticing where her footsteps fell or if her feet touched the ground at all; and every now and then she kept on uttering the word 'Mother' and making some soliloquy. In this connection we are put in mind of the high regard that Sister Nivedita had for the Mother. In a letter dated the 11th of December, 1911, written from Cambridge Mass., Nivedita acknowledges that when thinking of Mary, the Mother of Jesus, the Holy Mother's face flashes in her mind.

The Mother did not stop merely by showering her love on these foreign devotees; she sometimes picked up their customs wonderfully well. One summer afternoon in April 1920, when a European woman came to her, the Mother said, 'Come,' and stretched forth her hand in the

1. A disciple of Swami Vivekananda who remained unmarried throughout her life and preached the Swami's message in and outside India through her saintly life and impressive talks. She and her sister Mrs. Leggett were called Jaya and Vijaya respectively by the great Swami.

European manner, caught hold of the woman's hand, and then kissed her in the Bengali fashion by touching her chin with the hand. The woman's daughter was ill, and so she came to seek the Mother's benediction. The Mother blessed her whole-heartedly, and then giving her some *bel* leaves and a lotus flower that had been offered to the Master she said, 'Touch your daughter's head with these.' The woman departed thanking her gratefully. The girl recovered; but the woman kept up her acquaintance with the Mother and took initiation from her in due course. The Mother loved her very much.

From Sister Nivedita we quote the following to illustrate the Mother's power to penetrate a new religious feeling or idea:

'I first realized this gift in the Holy Mother, on the occasion of a visit that she paid us in recent years, on the afternoon of a certain Easter-Day. Before that, probably, I had always been too much absorbed, when with her, in striving to learn what she represented, to think of observing her in the contrary position. On this particular occasion, however, after going over our whole house, the Mother and her party expressed a desire to rest in the chapel, and hear something of the meaning of the Christian festival. This was followed by Easter music, and singing, with our small French organ. And in the swiftness of her comprehension and the depth of her sympathy with these resurrection hymns, unimpeded by any foreignness or unfamiliarity in them, we saw revealed for the first time, one of the most impressive aspects of the great religious culture of Sarada Devi. The same trait came out again one evening, when in the midst of her little circle the Holy Mother asked *guru-bhagini* and myself, to describe to her a European wedding. With much fun and laughter, personating now the "Christian brahmin", and again the bride and bridegroom, we complied. But we were neither of us prepared for the effect of the marriage vow, "For better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in

health—till death do us part,” were words that drew exclamations of delight from all about us. But none appreciated them as did the Mother. Again and again she had them repeated to her. “Oh the *Dharmi* words! the righteous words!” she said. (*The Master as I saw Him*, pp. 149–50).

SPIRITUAL MINISTRATION

We have already spoken of how the Master revealed the Mother's identity with Saraswati, the goddess of learning, who had come down to impart wisdom. The wisdom that he spoke of had no worldly connotation, but it meant that flowering of the mind whereby it can have a life-transforming vision of Divinity. This awakening of a higher consciousness was one of the main functions of the Mother. But while we analyse this character and compose different chapters just because it suits our convenience to study a magnificent personality from different points of view, we must remember that it is an indivisible whole, which again draws its sustenance from and has its being in a more basic Entity. This ultimate Power defies all attempts at fragmentation; and so our limited intellect cannot grasp this Infinity. Still through our prismatic mind we try to understand Saradamani Devi as the mother, the guru, or the Deity. But a little thought will convince us that all these three aspects are inalienably blended in her finely integrated and harmonized life. Whenever she appears to us as the Mother, we get also a glimpse of her inherent power of imparting that true knowledge that dispels all ignorance; when we approach her as a guru, she draws us to her lap as a mother; and when we want to recognize the mother and guru in her, we find her seated transcendently in her divine effulgence. In fact, we cannot discern where any of these mutually dependent aspects ends and another begins. And yet, we have to proceed along this ingenious path of analysis, for man cannot do otherwise. To us, then, she is the mother, full of unquestioning affection; Sarada, the bestower of the highest wisdom; and the Deity (Devi), full of purity, glory, and supernormal powers, and granting salvation to all. Of the early manifestation of the power of spiritual ministration and its evolution in her life, we have already got

a glimpse. In the present chapter we shall visualize its consummation.

The power of imparting wisdom that we meet with in the Mother is only one phase of the Divine grace that took human form for the good of all. If we approach this from the point of view of ordinary spiritual relationship, we shall merely be depriving ourselves of a fuller comprehension. The true guru is a saviour, who through his unbounded love accepts the entire responsibility of his disciple. Not only this; often enough he transfers to himself the disciple's sins and physical maladies and suffers vicariously. He does this consciously; and though he suffers in consequence, he does not give it up. Such instances are plentiful in the Mother's life; but we shall relate only a few for satisfying the curiosity of the readers. During her last illness at the 'Udbodhan', the Mother communicated her inner feelings to a devotee¹ thus, 'Do you think that even though the Master does not spare this body, I can have any respite till any of the souls whose responsibility I have accepted is left unredeemed? I shall have to be by their side. I have accepted the burden of all their merits and demerits. It is no fun to impart initiation. What a burden one has to take upon one's shoulders, and how much thought one has to bestow on them! See, for instance, when your father died, I too felt sad. I thought, "What a trial the Master has now thrust this boy into!" My anxiety is, how you can struggle out of it. That's why I talked with you so much. How can you understand all this? If you could understand everything, my burden would be less heavy. The Master is making diverse people play in diverse ways; and it is I who have to bear the brunt. I can't possibly leave those whom I have accepted as my own.'

This relationship between the guru and the disciple is not established by any formal process for this present span of life; it is an obligation voluntarily undertaken by the

1. He was then a Brahmachari, but left the Order after remaining in it for some years.

guru out of his compassion and lasts for all eternity. The Mother carried on a constant mental *japa*. In old age, when owing to physical weakness, she had to spend longer hours in her bed, the attendant noticed that she was doing *japa* even while in bed. At night her sleep was very light, so much so, that she responded to the first call. The attendant might ask in wonder, 'Are you not asleep, or don't you get sleep?' The Mother would reply, 'What can I do, my son? The boys come and entreat me eagerly. They take the *mantra* and go home. But nobody does any *japa* regularly. Some don't do it even once. Yet as I have shouldered the burden, should I not look after them? That's why I do *japa* and pray to the Master, "O Master, grant them enlightenment, grant them emancipation, and do you take on yourself their care in every way here and hereafter! This world is full of trials and tribulations. May they never have to come back again."'

Into a devotee's mind the Mother instilled these words of courage and assurance, 'What fear need you have, my son? Your thought comes to me well enough. You need not do anything; I am doing everything for you.' The devotee inquired, 'Do you have to work for all your sons wherever they may be?' The Mother replied, 'For all I have to work.' The devotee further asked, 'You have so many children; do you remember them all?' The Mother first admitted that she could not recollect all; and then she explained, 'I do *japa* for those whom I can recollect. And for those that I don't remember I pray to the Master thus, "Master, I have many sons in many places. Do you please look after those whose names I can't remember, and graciously grant that they may prosper."'

Out of a childish heedlessness, Swami Vishweshwarananda once suggested to the Mother that, since it was not possible for her to think personally of the welfare of each of her disciples, it was meet and proper to keep their number within practicable limits. The Mother met the accusation in her simple and guileless way by saying, 'As to

that, the Master did not forbid me. He explained so many things to me; would he not have forbidden this if he had felt the need? I entrust all the responsibility to the Master and to him I pray every day, "Do please look after every one of them, wherever they may be." And mind you, these *mantras* have all come from the Master—he gave them to me—and they are of proved efficacy.' In other words, the good of the disciples did not depend merely on their being remembered by the guru; the *mantra* had its own intrinsic power.

About the power of *mantra* and the taking over of sins, the Mother said to Brahmachari Rashbihari on another occasion (February 1913), 'Energy is transferred through a *mantra*—the guru's goes to the disciple and the disciple's comes to the guru. That's how sin is accepted through the imparting of *mantra* and the body gets so many diseases. It's a hard task to be a guru; one has to take over the disciples' sins. The guru has to take a share if a sin is committed by a disciple. If the disciple is good, the guru also is benefited.'

The Mother was at the Belur Math during the worship of Durga in 1916, when on the second day of the celebration many devotees saluted her by touching her feet. Subsequently Yogin-Ma saw the Mother washing her feet again and again with Ganges water, and she said, 'What are you at, Mother? You will catch cold as a result of this.' The Mother replied, 'How can I explain, Yogen? The body becomes soothed when some people touch my feet, while it is on fire as it were, when others do so, and I don't get relief unless I wash the feet with Ganges water.'

The Mother suffered, and she was aware of the cause of the suffering, and yet for the disciples' good she worked without wincing, though on rare occasions one could get an inkling of the real state of things from such casual remarks as this: 'My God! It's as though I am having all-day bouts of wrestling—the devotees come in a never-ending stream. It is too much for this body. As a result of my

prayer to the Master I have succeeded in keeping the mind constantly engaged here through thoughts of Radhu.' In reality, however, this was a passing mood in a mind that had willingly taken upon itself the task of universal welfare; and though such sentiments expressed her agonies, they never indicated bitterness. Once a devotee said, 'Mother, it's said that you have got rheumatism because of your acceptance of the devotees' sins. I have an earnest prayer to make—don't you suffer for my sake; ordain it so that I myself may suffer the consequences of my own work.' The Mother replied quickly, 'How can that be so, my boy, how can that be so? You keep well, and let me suffer.'

Although the Mother thus suffered for her disciples' sins, her outlook on sinners was one of pity rather than of hatred. A devotee was apprehensive that even after getting a mother like the Holy Mother he might not have his life's objective fulfilled. The Mother encouraged him saying, 'Why are you afraid, son? Know that the Master is ever behind you. And I am there. Don't fear so long as I am your Mother. For the Master has truly promised to me, "At the last moment I shall lead by the hand all those who will come to you." Whatsoever any one of you may do, and howsoever any one may behave, the Master will have to come at last to take you. The Lord has given (men) hands and feet (the senses); and sure enough, they will have their play.'

A woman of a respectable family, who had misbehaved through some evil impulse, became penitent and was led by good luck to the Holy Mother. She stood trembling with a sense of her guilt at the doorway and said, 'Mother, what will be my lot? I am not fit to draw nearer to you in this holy chapel.' The Mother stepped forward and throwing her holy arms round the woman's neck, said, 'Come, my daughter, come in. You have realized what sin is, and you are repentant. Come, I shall initiate you. Lay everything at the Master's feet; and cast away all fear.' The Mother

herself explained one day the cause of this unstinted love, 'Why, my dear, did the Master come only to enjoy *rasagollas*?'

In association with her vicarious suffering for the sins of others was to be found an unquenchable desire for doing good. If she had no new devotee at her place at Jayrambati, she would often be heard to say, 'There's no devotee today.' When Swami Gaurishananda was at Jayrambati, the Mother's rheumatism had worsened, making it difficult for her to move about freely. But even in that state the Swami heard her say one day to the Master, 'This day, too, is going in vain! No one has turned up today! Did you not say, "You will have to do some thing or other every day?"' She kept on looking out to see if anyone was coming, saying to the Master with fixed eyes, 'How is it, Master? Will the day go in vain?' The Mother's face brightened up when three devotees came the next day.

She used to say, 'I impart *mantra* out of pity. They become importunate, they weep, their sight fills me with mercy. Out of compassion I grant initiation. Else what do I gain? One has to take over sins by giving initiation. I think thus, 'The body will go anyhow: still let them have something.' A devotee one day (January 1912) communicated to the Mother a dream in which a certain man was begging her for initiation and she was refusing him saying, 'If I do anything to this man just now, then I shall not live, — my body will fall away.' The dreamer also forbade the Mother; still she did something to the man by touching his chest and neck while repeating those words of apprehension. Hearing of the dream the Mother said, 'I become so disgusted at times by the supplication of some people that I think, "This body will certainly fall off; so let it go even now; let me give him *mantra*."' At Banaras, the Mother said on another occasion (November 1912), 'I don't remember to have done any sin from my birth. I touched him (Sri Ramakrishna) when I was five years old. Even granting that my wisdom had not deve-

loped then, there's no denying the fact that he touched me. Why should I then have such ordeals? Others are becoming free by virtue of their having touched him; and is my delusion alone so exceptionally great? My mind that tries to soar high day and night, I keep down through compassion for these people.' At the Koalpara Ashrama, a devotee advised the Mother, 'Since the touch of your devotees makes you suffer, it is better to avoid it.' But the Mother replied, 'No, my son, it's for this that we came. If we don't take over the sins and sufferings, and don't digest them, who else will? Who else will bear the burden of the sinners?' She said, however, 'A pure man's touch brings joy.' But we are at present pursuing a different topic; now we are discussing the unquestioning love of the ever graceful Mother.

One morning three devotees came to Jayrambati with a letter of introduction from Swami Brahmananda. The Mother heard the letter read out and called in the devotees; but she sat with her legs folded, though it was usual for her, because of her rheumatism, to keep them stretched out even in the presence of devotees. After the devotees had saluted her, she was heard saying, 'So, at last Rakhal has sent me these!' She refused to initiate them and directed them to go to the Belur Math. The devotees obeyed her for the time being and went to the outer apartment. But their disappointment was too great to be easily assuaged; and hence they approached her for the second time to be more propitious. She, however, was inflexible and spoke to the Master thus, 'Master, I prayed to you yesterday that the day might not pass uselessly. And at long last you too bring these!' Inexorability was, however, against her grain; and she yielded at last saying, 'Master, let me carry on your work so long as the body lasts.' The initiation was duly finished. A few days later Swamis Brahmananda, Premananda, Shivananda, and Saradananda heard the whole incident sitting on the upper verandah of the Belur Math on the Ganges side. The

narration over, Swami Brahmananda sat without a word for a pretty long time. Swami Premananda heaved a long sigh and said with folded hands, 'Mercy, mercy! It's by this glorious compassion that the Mother is protecting us for ever. We can't express in words the poison that she has accepted. If we had done so, we would have been burnt down to ashes.'

Swayed by compassion, the Mother could not sometimes take care of her own health. Once when she had become very feeble owing to continuous suffering from malaria, and by Swami Saradananda's instruction interviews etc., had been suspended, there came a visitor from Barisal. Then ensued a discussion among the attendants as to whether he should be allowed to see the Mother. She, however, heard something of the talk that was going on and, coming to the door of the house, told Swami Parameshwarananda, 'Why do you prevent his coming?' The Swami replied, 'Swami Saradananda has ordered us to do so.' At this she said firmly, 'What has Sarat to say? That's why we have come. I shall initiate him.' And in truth she did initiate him the next day.

A devotee, however weak he might be, would have an accession of strength, courage and faith, if he could but come to the Mother. A devotee could not have peace of mind although he made *japa*. The Mother told him encouragingly that the mind would be pacified by practice. But this could hardly comfort him. He had heard that if a disciple failed to make *japa*, it harmed the guru; hence he wanted to return the *mantra* to the Mother. At this she said, 'Now see, how he talks! I lose my sleep in thought of you all; and the Master has blessed you long ago.' Tears rolled down her cheeks as she spoke; and with emotions she continued, 'Well, you need not make any *japa* of the *mantra* any more.' The devotee returned to his senses now, and in consternation he ejaculated, 'Mother, so you snatch away everything I had! What am I to do now? Am I, then, O Mother, condemned to hell?'

The Mother at once uttered these heartening words, 'What! You, who are my son, will be damned! Whoever has come here, whoever is my son is already redeemed. Destiny dare not throw my children into hell. Free yourself from all anxiety by entrusting your future to me. And remember this always, that there's one behind you who will come to you at the right moment and leads you to the everlasting domain.' In a similar position she cheered up another drooping spirit with the words, 'Whatever may be the position now (i.e., even though *japa* and meditation may not be very regular), the Master will have to come at last (to take you). He himself promised this; can his own words be meaningless? Do as it pleases you.'

On receiving a despondent letter at Jayrambati from a Sannyasin disciple in 1916, she said, 'How is that, my dear! Is the Master's name such an empty word as to go in vain? That name can never fail. Those who have come here with their minds fixed on the Master, will have the vision of their chosen Deity as a dead certainty. If they don't get this at any other time, they can't but have it at the time of death.'

In the foregoing assurance the Mother has drawn pointed attention to the need of strengthening one's faith for the chosen Deity or for both the guru and the chosen Deity. In the two illustrations we adduce, now, faith and reverence for the guru are more prominently emphasized. Sri Mahendranath Gupta, on his arrival at Jayrambati in 1915, imagined that any meditation or *japa* undertaken at the holy village of the Mother's nativity would lead to greater results. Therefore he overdid these a little one day. When he went to salute the Mother that day, she said, 'Now that you are with your mother, what's the need of so much *japa* and meditation? I, indeed, am doing everything for you. Now eat and live merrily, free from all care.'

In 1907, Swami Girijananda, then a Brahmachari, was told by the Mother at Jayrambati, 'My boy, it's not

proper to make any *japa* in the guru's house.' And yet a little earlier he had been told by her, 'The repetition of the *mantra* for at least one hundred and eight times in accordance with the guru's direction must be done by you every day without fail. Then, again, you are holy men; you will have to do *japa* always.' Finding the two instructions rather contradictory, Girijananda asked, 'Should I then forgo the repetition of the *mantra* even for one hundred and eight times?' 'You will repeat one hundred and eight times as instructed by the guru', corrected the Mother at once, 'but nothing more.'

In these invaluable talks one gets on the one hand examples of the promise of redemption coupled with generation of faith, and on the other hand indication of acceptance of the responsibility of the disciple and a fervent appeal for cultivating love for the guru and God. In this connection we recall — first, that the Master asked Girishchandra Ghosh to give up all formal practices and to execute a power of attorney, as it were, in favour of the Master to do everything in his stead; and secondly, that Jesus Christ indicated that as a marriage party spends the time in merriment in the bridegroom's company, so also if Christ's disciples cultivated real love for him rather than punctiliousness for formalities, they would be nearer Heaven. In the *Svetasvatara Upanishad* (VI.23), love for the guru and god has been eulogized as an absolute necessity. In fact, how can one meditate upon another if one has no love for the entity concerned? And how can one have any faith in any wisdom, if one has it not for the teacher? Therefore it was that the Mother shouldered her children's responsibility, and loved them fondly, and in return expected them to love her equally and to accept her as the one guiding star of their lives.

But the above discussion should not make any reader jump to the conclusion that the Mother decried *japa* or meditation, or for the matter of that, any formal practice as such. If that were so, why did she initiate hundreds of

her disciples, and why did she train them in spiritual practices? In fact, the above examples are extraordinary, and they underline something more fundamental than meets the eye. We introduced them simply because uncommon examples more easily bring into prominence the essential qualities of a rare personality. But if we confine our vision merely to these events, we shall have at best a partial view of the character we are studying. She came for the generality of people and spent her life among them. Hence to understand her fully we must descend to this level of common man. We shall find her that for ordinary men she chose an integrated formal path of faith and devotion, into which she breathed a new life; and she made easy and enjoyable a strict spiritual discipline that was otherwise hard and horrifying.

After initiation, Sri Nareshchandra Chakravarty asked her, 'Mother, shall I have to become a vegetarian now?' The Mother replied, 'What a question! Why should you be a vegetarian? Why should my boys be vegetarians? You should eat plentifully and live cheerfully.' But when he asked again, 'Suppose I can't do *japa* of the *mantra* of my chosen Deity', the Mother said with a firm voice, 'What do you mean? You won't do *japa* of your *mantra*? What a suggestion! If you don't do the *japa*, you lose; that affects me not in the least!'

To a devotee the Mother said, 'How can one do without *japa*, and meditation? These have got to be done.' When the devotee complained that the impurities of his mind were not being removed in spite of these, she said, 'Through the practice of *japa* they will go. How can one afford to do without these practices?' Another devotee asked the Mother (1907) about initiation, 'Well, Mother, what's the need of taking a *mantra*? If instead of doing *japa* of a particular *mantra*, one simply goes on repeating "Mother Kali", "Mother Kali", (for instance), will that not be sufficient?' The Mother replied, 'The *mantra* purifies the body. A man becomes holy by doing *japa* of the

Lord's *mantra*... The *mantra* is necessary for purification of the body, if not for anything else.' On another occasion (February 1913), a disciple showed her a tiny seed of the huge banyan tree and said, 'Do you see, Mother, how small it is — tinier even than the tiniest seed we know, and yet what a huge tree sprouts from it!' The Mother said, 'Why should it not be so? Consider, for instance, how small the seed of the Lord's name is; and yet from this sprout in time divine moods, devotion and love.'

A disciple who had developed mental aberration, returned his rosary to the Mother. When a monk asked her whether he had returned the *mantra* also, she replied, 'Can that ever be? It's a living *mantra*. Can there be any giving back of it — the *mantra* that one has once received, the great *mantra* that it is? If one has but once a love for his guru, can he ever be despoiled of it?'

About the efficacy of *japa* the Mother once said, 'By *japa* and austerity is cut asunder the bondage of *Karma* (past action). But God can't be realized except through love and devotion. As for *japa* and such other things, do you know what they stand for? Through them the senses etc., become subdued.' On another day she said, 'One should perform *japa*, meditation, etc., at regular hours giving no room for laziness.' At other times she declared, 'If one can repeat the *mantra* fifteen to twenty thousand times every day, then it will show results. Let him do so first, if he does not get success, let him come and say so. But one has to practise a little attentively. Doing nothing and neglecting everything, they merely complain, "Why does not my *japa* bear fruit?", 'Work you have to do as a matter of course; work keeps the mind well. But *japa*, meditation, and prayer are specially needed; one should sit up at least in the morning and in the evening. That is like the helm of a boat. When one sits up for a while in the evening, there comes to one's mind for consideration what one has done throughout the day. Then one has to compare the

state of mind one has today with what one had yesterday. Then one should meditate on one's chosen Deity as one goes on doing *japa*. How can you know how you are conducting yourself unless you have *japa* and meditation every morning and evening side by side with work? 'It's very necessary to have a fixed time for *japa* and meditation.' Again, she instructed certain advanced souls to have a constant remembrance of God. At the time of returning home (April 1919) after initiation at Koalpara, a certain devotee asked her, 'Mother, what's the secret?' She pointed to a small timepiece in a niche, and said, 'As that timepiece is ticking, so also go on repeating God's name, that will bring you everything; nothing more need be done.'

In fact, *japa* occupied a very high place in her estimation. When instructing a gifted man about the path of knowledge, she might say now and then, 'That *japa* or muttering is meant for women; you have your knowledge;' but if we extend our search beyond such unusual utterances, we shall find her emphasizing the importance of *japa* again and again, and herself doing *japa* for the good of her disciples. Nevertheless, from a higher standpoint she unequivocally decried *japa* as a mere mechanical process when she said, 'These *mantras* and the like are nothing, my daughter; devotion is all. In the Master you will find your guru and chosen Deity. He is all.' And drawing attention to divine grace she said, 'You talk of having done so much of *japa*, or so much of work; but nothing will avail. Who can achieve anything unless Mahamaya opens the way. O creatures, surrender yourselves, just surrender yourselves. Then only will She be gracious and clear the way for you.' To another devotee she said, 'Through *japa* and austerity the bondage of *Karma* is cut asunder, but God cannot be realized unless through love and devotion. Did the cowherds get Krishna by *japa* and meditation or by talking to him chummily as "Come here, dear", "Take this, dear", "Eat this, dear"?''

Till one attains this attitude of surrender and this passionate love, no spiritual practice is to be neglected; any one aspiring to salvation must have recourse to one of these practices. A consideration of the Mother's instruction about the various disciplines will impress this fact on us. Sri Shyamacharan Chakravarty of Rangoon began practising the control of breath for about three hours a day in accordance with what he had read in the *Raja-yoga* of Swami Vivekananda. As a result, he began to have a buzzing sound in his ears of which he could not be cured, so that he had to take leave from his office. On his visit to the Belur Math during this leave, he came to know of the Holy Mother and proceeded to Jayrambati. As soon as he set foot in the village, his ailment left him. Afterwards when he apprised the Mother of his intention to practise *yoga*, she replied, 'What energy have you stored up in your body, my boy, and what have you in your mind that you want to practise *yoga*?' 'Have I no way out, then?' asked the eager devotee. 'I shall tell you whatever is to be done,' assured the Mother. After initiation she instructed him to do *japa* twice daily. Shyamacharan wanted to do it thrice and wished to know if anything more need be done. The Mother repeated her instruction about doing *japa* twice daily and concluded, 'That's enough for all you want.' 'What shall I do when on a journey?' inquired the disciple. 'It will be enough if you think mentally,' replied the Mother.

A monastic disciple asked her in Banaras (January 1913), 'I have been practising the control of breath a little; should I continue it?' The Mother replied, 'You may do it just a little; it's no good heating the brain by too much practice of it. And if the mind settles down of its own accord, what more need is there of the control of breath?' This monk told the Mother again (June 1919) at Koalpara, 'I have been practising *asanas* (postures) for some time for the sake of health. These postures help digestion and strengthen the vow of celibacy.' The Mother's

instruction was, 'You may practise after taking into consideration both sides of the question, namely, that the mind may become too much body-conscious, and the total giving up may ruin health.' This was her opinion about postures as resorted to for the sake of health. As for a suitable posture as a help to a long course of *japa*, she said, 'Practise some sort of sitting posture which will help you to sit for two or three hours. When you feel as if pins and needles are pricking your leg, you may change your position. In course of time you will have no discomfort.' She also urged on her disciples the need for such practices as worship. When the above devotee said in connection with the God Vishwanatha of Banaras, 'Mother, we have no longer any liking for a stone image of Siva', the Mother said with surprise, 'How is that so, my boy? What a number of great sinners are coming to Banaras and getting redemption by touching Vishwanatha! He is taking over everybody's sin without demur.' She also encouraged many to read the scriptural texts regularly, as for instance, some three or four verses from the *Gita* every day.

And yet it is true that she constantly warned the sentimental devotees against forgetting the ideals and sticking to rituals alone as the be-all and end-all of life. In a letter to Sri Rajendrakumar Datta (11-11-'16), she wrote, 'What need I tell you about your proposal to wear the sacred thread?¹ This is no bad thing, though a social institution. With regard to these matters you should do as you think best. If you take up the sacred thread, see to it that it is adequately utilized. Do not adopt anything as a mere fad. You may do *japa* of any *mantra* you like after finishing first the *japa* of your chosen *mantra*. True it is that there is no hard and fast rule about the time of *japa*, yet morning and evening are the favourable periods.

1. Refers to a movement for the wearing of the sacred thread by certain classes of non-brahmins who assert themselves as really belonging to the twice-born castes—Kshatriyas and Vaishyas—though their forefathers discarded the thread for some reason.

Whatever the time be, you must do *japa* every day; it is not good to forgo it any day.' Once on seeing some one worshipping Siva, a woman devotee felt a hankering to do likewise. When she came to the Mother for instruction and approval, the latter said, 'All worship — of Kali, Durga, and others — can be performed with the *mantra* that I have imparted. But if anyone so desires, one can learn other *mantras* also for those purposes. You have no need of all that.' When the question arose regarding the offering of food to the Master in accordance with scriptural formalities, the Mother said, 'There's no great need of scriptural forms. Everything can be done with the *mantra* of the chosen Deity.'

From an examination of the times and places of initiation, as also of the persons receiving it, we are forced to the conclusion, that as the Mother had her eyes riveted on the one goal of life, viz., the realization of God, she could not possibly allow mere outward circumstances to interfere with her inner conviction. Any good means, be that enjoined by the scriptures, or adopted for the time being out of a sincere eagerness for excellence, that appeared to her as subservient to the main objective, she adopted without hesitation, and drew the 'disciples' attention to it. This view is substantiated by her directions to her disciples with regard to the social and religious customs of everyday life.

Orthodoxy requires that the morning prayer and meditation should be done before eating. But Sri Shau-ryendra Mazumdar could not sit for his *japa* or meditation until he had his morning tea. Hence after initiation he told the Mother of this difficulty and wanted direction. The Mother told him, 'My son, can a mother ever be step-motherly? You may, if you like, first eat and then begin *japa* and meditation.' Nalin Babu who had not finished his period of mourning, consequent on the death of his mother, hesitated to eat some cakes offered to him by the Holy Mother and asked for her advice, whereupon she said

‘What’s the harm in that, my son? I too am your mother. I offer it, and there’s no transgression here.’ As for food, she advised Shyamachran Chakravarty, ‘My son you can eat fish, meat, indeed anything you like. But the Master forbade eating the food connected with the first funeral obsequies following any death, or pertaining to a purificatory ceremony (after the main wedding).’

A woman devotee asked the Mother, if it was permissible for a woman to perform worship if she happened to be suffering under any temporary social disability. The Mother referred her to what the Master had said to herself under similar circumstances and then added, ‘Yes, my daughter, it is permissible if one has the requisite devotion for the Master..you can worship; but if you feel any compunction, then don’t do it.’ But when another woman raised the same question on another day, the Mother said, ‘How can one do any work for gods and goddesses when in such a state? Well, you don’t do it.’

Without ignoring settled norms, but rather giving an enlightened allegiance to them, the Mother wanted to draw the devotees to the path of fervent love. Her process of initiation, followed this middle course. In refusing initiation to a candidate she said, ‘You have your ancestral guru; you can as well have it from him.’ Again, there are instances where she kept intact the *mantra* of the family guru and adding to it a new one instructed the disciple to repeat first the former *mantra* ten times and then repeat the new one. Such variations accorded with the dispositions of the candidates as also the Mother’s own natural mood. About this double initiation Sri Kumudbandhu Sen one day heard the Mother speak thus at the Sarkarbari Lane house: ‘Sometimes people of little faith and of unsteady mind come for initiation. I mentally read their past history from their very appearance and behaviour and ask them whether they were previously initiated by someone else. When they

reply in the affirmative, I tell them, "Strange You have come again for initiation! You have no faith in the *mantra* already given by your guru. What is a *mantra* but the holy name of God. Why have you come for initiation again?" Then they beg to be forgiven and again implore me with tears in their eyes. I can't bear anybody's tears. I pray to the Master for strengthening their faith, and through his direction I give them initiation in addition to the *mantra* already received by them. This additional *mantra* is given for fresh stimulus and strength in order to increase their faith in the name of God.' (*Prabuddha Bharata*, June 1952, p. 261).

She made a distinction between the teacher who initiates and the teacher who instructs. About this she wrote to a devotee (January 1911) that one might have an instructing teacher for technical *yoga* processes etc., but the initiating teacher must not be changed. When the letter of an applicant for initiation was read out to her (March 1914), she remarked, 'The purpose of initiation is to try to realize God through sincere spiritual effort; it's not meant for stopping the allowances of the family guru. I can agree to initiate this boy on condition that he will revere his family guru as much as he will do me and that he will agree to increase the guru's monthly allowances according to his resources.' The applicant agreed to these conditions and he was initiated. About the initiating teacher, the Mother had very liberal views. On being told that a man who had not much of spirituality was giving *mantras* to others, she said, 'These holy men have something of professionalism. But mind you, even this is efficacious. Men will not do anything of their own accord; but the instruction of these people will induce them to call on God a little.' Yet, in spite of such generous feelings, she was not to be silenced by mere unreasonable demands or assertion of prescriptive rights. To Sri Taraknath Roy she wrote in a letter (March 1913), 'Pay to the family guru his annual allowance, and something-

more also if you can afford; but where can you get the wherewithal to satisfy him with money?' When a woman devotee wrote that she had been cursed by her family guru on being informed of her having been initiated by the Mother, the Mother had it written in reply, 'Not even a brahmin's curse touches one who takes refuge in the Master. You need have no fear.'

One must have real craving for initiation. Granted that hankering, a way can be found out despite a thousand obstacles. A woman wrote to the Mother that she could not have her initiation because of the opposition of her husband's parents. The Mother intimated to her that God was omnipresent, and that He would respond to all people's calls. Another poor boy came to the 'Udbodhan', but went away disappointed without meeting the Mother because she was ill then. So he wanted to ascertain by means of a letter if he would be more fortunate when he turned up next time. The Mother remarked, 'The point is this: anyone whose time is ripe for getting beyond the world, will come away tearing off all bonds, nobody can keep him back even with fetters. Want of money, waiting for a reply, fear of returning disappointed - all these are meaningless.' The Mother permitted him to come. Before married women were initiated, the Mother made sure that they had their husbands' consent. If such concurrence was forthcoming she initiated the wife even though the husband might not be a disciple.

Those who came for initiation to her were seldom rejected unless it was physically impossible for her. If it was a pure soul, she gave the *mantra* even without being asked for, or she did so on the very first approach. Vaikuntha Babu of Cuttack met the Mother at Kothar. He had no idea of taking initiation at the time and therefore returned home after bowing down to her. But a strong attraction brought him back to Kothar in some four days. When he went to pay his respects to the Mother on the eve of his return this time, she said, 'Well,

stay here for the morrow and go the day after.' Later he was told that the Mother would bless him, and so he must get ready on the morrow. He understood nothing of this; still at the Mother's call he appeared before her the next day. She asked him, 'Will you take *mantra*?' Vaikuntha answered, 'Kindly give, if it so pleases you. I know nothing.' Then the Mother again inquired, 'Of which deity will you have the *mantra*?' Vaikuntha found no answer, for he had not thought over the matter. The Mother, therefore, chose the *mantra* for him.

The Mother was once staying in Calcutta recovering from a prolonged illness at Jayrambati, which had heavily told on her health. All interviews were, therefore, stopped. At that time there came a Parsi youth to meet her. He had read some of Swami Vivekananda's books and felt drawn towards Vedanta. Being impressed by him, Swami Saradananda allowed him to go upstairs to the Mother's presence. Once there, he implored, 'Revered Mother, give me some great *mantra* through which I may realize the Lord.' At this the Mother turned to Brahmachari Rashbihari and said, 'Shall I give? Yes, let me do so.' Rashbihari intervened, 'How can that be so! You have just recovered from illness, nobody is allowed even to see you! What will Sarat Maharaj think when he hears of this! Not now, it can be in future.' The Mother said, 'Very well, go and consult Sarat.' When the Brahmachari returned with Swami Saradananda's unquestioning consent, he found the Mother waiting ready with Ganges water and two small carpets spread for herself and the Parsi youth. After the initiation she said, 'He's a fine boy; he understood what I said well enough.'

In fact, the Mother imparted initiation because of a felt inspiration. She used to say, 'The Master is sending these (candidates),' or 'No, no; I am nobody. It's the Master who graciously blesses them. I am only his instrument.' During such initiation, difference of languages created no real difficulty. She spoke in Bengali, but the

disciples understood her. When she was in the South, the local people came and begged, 'Mantra, please!' 'Instruction, please!' There also she knew that to be the apt *mantra* for a particular candidate which welled up from her heart spontaneously. She used to say, 'As soon as I am about to impart a *mantra* to some people, there arises in the mind such a thought as "Give this", "Give this", whereas in other cases, it appears as though I know nothing, nothing comes to my mind. I keep on sitting. Then after a long cogitation I can visualize the *mantra*. In the case of a good aspirant the *mantra* springs up from the mind instantaneously.'

At times the Mother initiated small boys. A boy of twelve years began to cry after saluting her at the 'Udbodhan' saying, 'I want the Mother's grace.' Everybody threw cold water on such sentimentalism, considering it nothing more than a childish whim or imitation. Next day an attendant of the Mother saw the boy sitting on the veranda outside the building. Such a sight was nothing unusual. Therefore he went to the market without heeding him. But while returning, he became curious to see the boy departing with a smiling face, and on asking him the reason for this, he was intrigued to learn that the boy had been initiated. Returning to the 'Udbodhan', he learnt about the whole incident. The Mother had sent Radhu downstairs saying, 'You will find a boy sitting below the porch; bring him up.' And thus she had given him the *mantra*; and now the boy was on his way to the market to get some fruits and sweets to be offered to the Mother as *guru-dakshina*¹. The attendant asked her, 'Mother, how strange it is that you have initiated such a small urchin? What does he understand?' The Mother replied, 'Howsoever that may be, my son, he is a boy; and yesterday he cried so much holding on to my feet! Tell me, whoever weeps for God? How many have such strong inclination?'

1. Offering in kind or cash to be given to the guru after one's initiation.

Two or three days before the Janmashtami that followed the Mother's return from Rameswaram, a young Brahmachari of Koalpara wanted to take *mantra* from her. He was then thirteen years old and was a favourite of the Mother. But the proposal evoked great opposition from Golap-Ma, who said, 'Strange that such a small boy, who will forget the *mantra* in a couple of days, should want initiation even now! The Mother hails from your parts. Take the *mantra* later, after due consideration of everything, when she goes that side.' So saying she left the place. The Mother, however, said, 'See, how Golap talks! Does any one forget what one learns as a boy? Let him do whatever he can even from this time. And then I am there, to be sure.' The initiation took place on the Janmashtami day. Finding the boy making his *japa* exactly as the Mother had shown, she said, 'There you are! Why should not this little thing stick to his mind? It certainly will. In future when the need arises, I shall show you everything over again.' The initiation over, the Mother gave him two sweets to eat, which had earlier been offered to the Master, and said, 'Don't be shy; one should partake of some *prasada* after the initiation.'

And yet, this was not the general custom. One day when somebody raised the question of the initiation of a boy of some seven or eight years of age, the Mother said, 'He is too young still; how can there be any initiation now? The boy is a devotee. Let him have long life, let him be a servant of the devotees.'

We have said that if the candidate was a desirable person, and if the Mother felt the inspiration, she did not take time and circumstances much into consideration. A devotee from Shillong resolved within himself that he would not go to the Mother unless he saw her seven times in dreams which would establish for him her divinity. Having been blessed with the seven visions through the Mother's grace, he went to Jayrambati to see her. When he was about to take leave of her, she said, 'It is best to

have your initiation before you go.' The devotee suggested that it might as well take place in Calcutta. But the Mother said, 'No, my son, let this thing be finished; it can be done even today.' The devotee reminded her, 'But I have partaken of *prasada*.' The Mother did not consider that any bar to the initiation and imparted the *mantra*. In truth, the grace of a true guru cannot be delimited by conditions.

One evening, a boy who had just been released from police vigilance, came to Koalpara to seek initiation. The Mother took a natural pity on him and agreed to bless him the next day. But since the Koalpara Ashrama was then in the bad books of the police, and the harbouring of an erstwhile suspect would give them another excuse for harassing the inmates, he was lodged in a house outside. Early next morning as the Mother was going from her own residence, the Jagadamba-Ashrama, to Radhu's house, the boy met her in the open field after his morning bath. Being ordered by the Mother, the Brahmachari brought for her a glass of water. Then it seemed as though she was searching for something to sit on. Hence the Brahmachari inquired, 'Shall I bring carpets for you?' 'Never mind,' said the Mother. 'You need not go again; get some straw, and let us both sit down.' Thus seated the Mother washed her lips ceremonially and gave him the *mantra*.

The Mother was waiting on the railway platform at Vishnupur for her train to Calcutta when an up-country porter discovered her and hurrying to her side fervently, 'You are my mother Sita; what a long time I have been searching for you! Where had you been so long?' And he began weeping. The Mother took mercy on him, consoled him, and asked him to bring a flower. The man offered that flower at her feet, and she gave him the *mantra*.

Under the eaves of her house at Jayarambati the Mother stood one day accepting the salutations of her sons. Last of all came one who held her feet and wept profusely without explaining why he did so. The Mother understood his

tearful prayer and signalling all to move away, gave him initiation, even while standing where she was.

From Ranchi there arrived a boy along with others to witness the Jagad-dhatri worship at the Mother's place at Jayrambati. But owing to the busy programme of the days of celebration, he found no opportunity to beg for initiation, nor did anybody else create any scope for him to do so, since he was considered to be too young for the purpose. When the day of bidding farewell came, the Mother was in indifferent health and remained indoors. The Ranchi boy, along with other devotees, went to the verandah of the room and waited there for his turn to go in and prostrate himself before her. When all had finished, he stepped in and began weeping so bitterly with his head on the Mother's feet that they became wet. The Mother lifted him up and asked, 'Why do you weep my son? What do you want? Will you take *mantra*?' The boy nodded. The Mother then closed the door and initiated him then and there.

The Mother had a girl-friend of her childhood days in the village. As they lay side by side one day, the Mother imparted the *mantra* to this friend.

Though it was true that under special circumstances the Mother forgot time or places, it is not to be inferred that such was the normal procedure. Usually she abided by tradition. For instance, she did not give initiation at Banaras, saying, 'Siva is the guru here.' She was not ordinarily willing to initiate anyone on the birthday of the Master, though she made exceptions to this rule. For instance, she initiated two persons on that day during her stay in Madras. On another occasion a sickly young man came to Jayrambati to be initiated on that day. He had not birth or wealth to back up his prayer. But the Mother looked into one's heart rather than at one's appearance; and when the man pleaded that unless he was initiated on that very day, he would consider himself extremely unfortunate inasmuch as he would not be able to come

again in his whole life, the Mother became gracious and although earlier she had intimated her unwillingness, and the attendant too now pleaded against her waiving her rule, she initiated the man that very day.

There are many examples to prove that the Mother selected the *mantras* in accordance with the mental make-up of the candidates. A young woman married to a cultured family went to her husband's house soon after initiation. There she meditated and did *japa* regularly; but she was ever in doubt as to whether the *mantra* was being properly pronounced. When she met the Mother after three years, she wanted to get the doubt resolved. Hearing of the difficulty, the Mother said, 'Well, my dear, that happened long ago. Can I have it in mind even now? Anyway you don't say anything, but wait a little; let me ask of the Master.' With these words, she entered the shrine, and coming out after a while said, 'Well, my daughter, did I give you this *mantra*?' The disciple admitted that she did. 'Then you repeat it,' said the Mother, 'there's no error in it.'

When Sri Rasiklal Roy approached the Mother for initiation, she wanted to ascertain from him his hereditary *mantra*. Rasiklal did not know this. The Mother kept quiet for a moment and then spoke, 'This is your family *mantra*,' and initiated him with it. On inquiry afterwards, it was proved that the Mother had not made any mistake.

When Sri Shashibhushan Mukherji of Bagda prayed for initiation in the *mantra* of the Sakti cult, the Mother corrected him by saying, 'My son, I see Rama in you. Do the people of your family do *japa* of Rama's *mantra*? Rama and Sakti are identical, to be sure. Then why should there be any hesitation in accepting the Rama *mantra*?' In fact, the whole family was devoted to Sri Ramachandra.

Though most often, family traditions and personal predilections coincided, in certain cases people ignored the

tutelary deities and chose other Gods; and in still others, family tradition differed from individual disposition. In such circumstances the Mother relied on her mind that was crystal clear, and as such correctly reflected for her the requisite *mantra*. Though the ancestors of Sri Saradakinkar Roy were worshippers of Sakti, he came under Vaishnava influence. Hence when he got a Sakti *mantra* from the Mother, he became a little perplexed. The Mother understood this and assured him that very afternoon out of her own accord, 'I have given you the right thing.'

In some cases the Mother asked the candidates about their preferences before the *mantras* were selected. If the candidates' choice tallied with her own, she used those *mantras*; otherwise her own vision got the pride of place. Sri Surendramohan Mukherji, when asked by the Mother, said that he had an attraction for Kali as seated on the lap of Siva. The Mother asserted, 'Can Sakti (Kali) ever exist without Siva, my son? Yours is the Sakti *mantra*.' After receiving initiation in that *mantra*, Surendramohan felt as though an electric current darted through his frame which began to quiver, so that he had no longer any doubt regarding the appropriateness of the *mantra*.

From Sri Karnatkumar Chaudhury we heard a charming anecdote which confirms much of what we have written so far. He had taken a *mantra* from another guru, but found no peace of mind. While in such a predicament he went to make obeisance to the Mother at the 'Udbodhan' in 1914 before he started for an assemblage of Vaishnavas at Vrindaban. The Mother was then seated for worship in the shrine. As Karnatkumar saluted her from outside, she motioned him to enter the room and salute her by touching her feet. This done, the Mother blessed him saying, 'Govinda (Krishna) will bless you.' This put new strength in him; but his old doubts persisted. After that his first wife died and he married a second time. As this

wife was a woman possessed, he had her initiation by his own guru. This, however, had no effect. At last the couple came to the Mother at Calcutta in 1916 for re-initiation. The Mother agreed to their proposal. But Golap-Ma got wind of this and objected, so that Karnatkumar had to come to the Mother again for reassurance. The Mother raised her hand as a sign of re-affirmation and said, 'I have already given you the word.' On the day of initiation the wife got fever. Nonetheless, they bathed in the Ganges and came to the Mother. Karnatkumar got his initiation first. In the meantime his wife's temperature shot up and she began shaking all over. In that room there were Golap-Ma and Sudhira Devi with her. Seeing the 'condition of the wife, Golap-Ma began admonishing her in her blunt way, 'She has come to reject her old guru. She has forgotten her *mantra*, and to crown all, she has got fever. There can be no question of initiation at all.' The Mother waited in the shrine-room for some time for the wife to turn up, and in the meantime she heard all that Golap-Ma said. Unmoved by Golap-Ma's arguments and impatient of delay, she called out at last, 'Sudhira, do bring her.' Thus the wife also was initiated. After this she got rid of her trouble.

Sometimes people got initiation in dreams and approached the Mother for confirmation or re-initiation. When one such devotee came, the Mother heard from the person the *mantra* received in the dream, explained its meaning, asked him to use it in his *japa*, and then imparting a new one said, 'Then do *japa* of this one and meditate.' The Mother was seen meditating a while before explaining the dream *mantra*.

Another devotee got a *mantra* from the Master in a dream. The Mother told him, 'Repeat the *mantra* that the Master has given you. I shall give you something too,' and she gave him a new *mantra*.

A boy saw in a dream that the Master seated him on his lap and imparted a *mantra*. The Mother did not give

him any other *mantra* but said, 'You have succeeded in obtaining his grace. You will attain your goal through the *japa* of this *mantra* alone.'

As soon as a certain woman devotee uttered the *Bija* (seed) of a *mantra* she had received in a dream, the Mother said, 'Yes, you belong to that fold. Well, well, you are fortunate.' She did not add any fresh *mantra*, but instructed her to do *japa* of this very *mantra*.

But a *mantra*, just because it was received in a super-normal way, had no appeal to the Mother unless it conformed to scriptures and her own unerring vision. Sri Jatindranath Roy used in his *japa* a *mantra* he had received in a dream. The Mother said, 'Well, dear boy, can there be a *mantra* without a *Bija*?' So she gave him initiation again with a fresh *mantra*. Kusumkumari Aich desired to be initiated by the Mother; but one thing or another hindered her from doing so. In the meanwhile, she got a *mantra* in a dream, which, however, brought her no peace of mind. Hence she went to the Mother and related to her the whole history, on hearing which the latter said, 'Some being is trying to encompass your ruin and to that end has given you that *mantra* in the name of three deities. You need have no fear any longer. Try to forget those few words as early as you can.' Then she gave her initiation with an altogether different *mantra*.

Though she was ever merciful and her life's mission was to save and help people, yet for their own good she often made them wait for some time or refused them at first, so that their eagerness might be intensified or they might repent by detecting their faults through self-analysis consequent on dejection. Sri Nareshchandra Chakravarty went to Jayrambati at the middle of January 1920, with a candidate for initiation at the bidding of Swami Dhirananda; and with them joined another gentleman. As the *Paush-Samkranti* day is observed in Bengal with the eating of many kinds of cakes, and their visit

took place near about that time, there arose on the way a desire in Nareshchandra's mind to eat some cakes at the Mother's house; but he kept silent about the matter. After they had reached Jayrambati and finished their bath, the proposal for initiation was communicated to the Mother through Kishori Maharaj (Swami Parameshwarananda); but the Mother refused. And when she was told that Swami Dhirananda had sent them, she said with a little irritation, 'What of that? My health is extremely bad; should I initiate in spite of that?' This refusal made the two candidates weep, but Kishori Maharaj could not gather up courage enough to approach the Mother again. However, at meal-time at noon Nareshchandra saw that he had on his plate the desired cakes; but as soon as he thought, 'Why has Mother sent this dry stuff; could she not procure a little milk?' he heard the Mother saying, 'Kishori, why have you served dry cakes to the boys? Send them some milk soon.' This emboldened Naresh; hence after siesta, he himself went to the Mother at the suggestion of the friends and interceded on their behalf, whereupon she said, 'So you also advise me to initiate them?' 'Yes, Mother, I do so,' said Nareshchandra with some emphasis. 'But what of the extreme impurity of their bodies?' argued the Mother. And she herself added, 'Well, ask them to live here for three nights. A three nights' stay will purify their bodies; for verily this is Siva's domain.' And as she spoke, she turned her forefinger around to indicate the entire sacred area.

At the 'Udbodhan' when Sri Vasantakumar Sarkar's wife begged to be initiated just after her husband had been blessed with the *mantra*, the Mother directed her for initiation from some monk at the Belur Math. As Vasantakumar's wife persisted in her importunity, the Mother refused again with some annoyance and sat down for worship. This cut her to the quick, and she fell down on the floor with extreme grief and then began singing piteously,

Can She that is the stone-built mountain's daughter have any pity
at heart?

Unless She were pitiless, could She kick Her husband on the chest?¹

The sweet voice and pathetic tone distracted the Mother's attention from the worship. She ordered the wailing woman to sing a few more songs and then asked her to stop, for she could not begin worship so long as she sang. The worship over, the candidate made her request again, which was readily granted. The Mother fixed a date for the happy day and as a present put a betel roll in the devotee's mouth.

Another point to be noted is that, though the Mother was ever merciful, all frivolity and all irrational demands were silenced before her august presence. Sri Navadvip-chandra Roy Varman, who obtained permission for the initiation of two young men, produced them at the 'Udbodhan' on the appointed day. The older of the two was initiated first, and then came the turn of the younger one, who, however, was nowhere to be found. The Mother said sorrowfully, 'The poor fellow is unlucky!' Subsequently, being asked about this flight, the younger one said that his mind was seized with an inexplicable fear.

Sri Chandramohan Datta, who belonged to the salaried staff of the 'Udbodhan', did many odd jobs for the Mother such as going to the market, in which connection he had free access to her. One day in the morning, Swami Shuddhananda, while going to the Ganges for bath with Swami Prajnananda, said to Chandramohan, in mere fun, 'Well, Chandra, you go to the Mother often enough and get from her *prasada* to eat. I tell you something; can you put this to the Mother?' 'There's no question of not being able,' assured Chandramohan. The Swami said, 'Can you tell Mother, "Mother, I want

1. Uma, identical with Kali in another form, was daughter of the god of the Himalayas, a heartless mass of rocks. Kali on one occasion stood on the chest of her husband Siva.

salvation ” ? ’ ‘ You wait a little,’ said Datta with bravado. ‘ I shall go forthwith and return in a trice after telling her.’ When he went up, the Mother was at her worship. Slowly he walked in, but he felt that for some reason his body shivered. Soon the Mother looked at him and wanted to know the reason for his coming. His heart still palpitated and something seemed to choke his throat. As a matter of sheer habit, however, he said, ‘ I want *prasada*.’ The Mother showed him by a sign the *prasada* kept covered under the cot and again engaged herself in the worship. It took him about an hour to get over that nervousness.

A TRANSCENDENTAL PRESENCE

As a sign of cognizing the Lord when He incarnates Himself on this earth it is said in the *Gita* (X. 13):

All the saints declare you, as also does the divine saint Narada
Thus also do Asita, Devala, and Vyasa; and you yourself admit
this to me.

We saw how the Master worshipped the Mother as a goddess, how he showed reverence towards her in various ways, and how he pointed out her divinity to the devotees. This was also declared times without number by Swami Vivekananda and the disciples of the Master. We shall adduce one more illustration of Swami Vivekananda's respectful reference to her, and then pass on to a consideration of the admission of this fact by the Mother herself.

When seated for initiating Sri Surendranath Sen, the great Swami refused, saying that he had known from the Master that Surendranath would be initiated by one mightier than himself. A few days later, Surendranath dreamt that he was seated on the Master's lap and was receiving the *mantra* from a motherly woman. Long after this in 1911, Surendranath went to Jayrambati during the worship of Durga; and there he was initiated by the Mother. Finding the new *mantra* and the *mantra* of the dream identical and the woman of the dream the same as the Holy Mother in front of him, Surendranath almost lost his outer consciousness. Later, he told the Mother everything about his dream.

The Master spoke of the Mother as the goddess Saraswati come down to impart wisdom, of which we had enough proof in the last chapter. But though this may succinctly describe one of her very important aspects, her personality is by no means circumscribed by this. Generally speaking, she was shy and soft by nature; but at times she could be bold and hard too. This aspect cannot be

called terrific, but it can be described as 'softer than a flower and yet harder than flint', which phrase was used by an Indian poet to mark the characteristics of the super-men. In this connection the reader may remember the incident of the mad Harish, and a few more are presented here to make the point clear.

On a summer evening, the Mother sat telling her rosary on the upper verandah of the 'Udbodhan' overlooking an open space across the road in front, where some people of the labouring class had set up some huts for their families. In one of those huts a man was beating his wife mercilessly. He started with fisticuffs and slaps; then he gave her such a kick that she rolled down into the courtyard with the babe in her arms. There again came down upon her a volley of heavy kicks. The Mother's *japa* stopped. And though she was noted for her suavity and soft, low voice, which could hardly be heard from the ground-floor, she now stood up holding the railing and scolding the man at the top of her voice, 'I say, you wretch, will you kill your wife outright? Alas, what a pity!' The man had lost his balance out of extreme anger, to be sure; but a look at that motherly figure acted on him like a charm on a hooded snake; he lowered his head and retreated at once. The Mother's sympathy made the woman now burst into a torrent of tears. Her fault was that she had not cooked rice at the proper time. A little later, the man's anger subsided, and he came to the woman to console her. At this, all the people who had gathered there on the Mother's verandah, moved away to their respective duties.

Taking advantage of the absence of the Master's nephew Sivaram from his village, his wife wanted, in collusion with the village potentates, to marry her little daughter Panchi to a family supposed to be comparatively lower in social position; and lest someone should undo her plan, she kept the child locked up in a room. Finding Ramlal, the other nephew of the Master, in an embarrassing position, Sri Prabodh Chatterji of Arambagh and

another devotee of Jayrambati skilfully released the child and carried her to Jayrambati before nightfall. They had done this without the Mother's knowledge; but after arriving there, they related everything to her to free their conscience from the sense of guilt. The first thing that the Mother wanted to know from them was whether this had the support of her elder nephew Ramlal. When they replied in the affirmative, she said that they need not worry any more. In the course of the conversation Prabodh Babu expressed his misgiving that the village dignitaries might take offence and create difficulties in future about the construction of the temple of the Master at Kamarpukur. Of course, that was not a very serious matter in his estimation, for the Master did not care for temples and memorials; besides there was no dearth of either even in those days. This remark hurt the Mother, and she said, 'How do you speak, my dear boy? The birth-place of the Master is a sacred place, a seat of his constant presence, and a holy resort for pilgrims. Should one speak of it in such a strain?' Prabodh Babu again apprehended that brother Sivaram's wife might go off her head and set fire to the houses. This made the Mother remark in an unusually sharp, drawling tone, 'It will be fine if it happens; it will be fine if it happens! It will be just as the Master liked. He liked funeral places, and all will be turned into a crematory.' And she burst out into a peal of laughter, in which the others present also joined at first; but as it persisted for long and by stages developed into a side-splitting roar, the others, filled with a supernatural awe, stopped and looked on with trepidation. The very next moment she stopped and broached other topics to divert their attention.

Many are the devotees who were struck with wonder by the sudden expression of the Mother's transcendental moods in the midst of ordinary human preoccupations. These emerged so unawares, like flashes of lightning, and the Mother composed herself so quickly that the devotees

got hardly any time to fathom them adequately. And yet the impression became irresistible that divinity was the essential component of that extraordinary character over which there was a veneer of womanishness to make her life a going concern. Brahmachari Gagan (Ritananda) noticed more than once, that whenever her divine side had the upper hand, it created all around a supernatural atmosphere which by an irresistible magnetic force transported all within its orbit to a higher plane for the time being. One morning, at about nine o'clock, he sat on the Mother's verandah at Jayrambati, chewing some fried-rice, while the Mother swept the verandah. Just then somebody was heard calling from outside, 'Mother dear, may it please you to give me alms!' At this the Mother said aside, 'I can't finish my duties, working though I am with innumerable hands!' Attracted by an ethereally soft and compassionate voice, no sooner did Gagan look up at her face than she stopped her broom and bending forward with one hand on her knees she said with a beaming face, 'Look at the fun; I have only two hands; and here I speak of having infinite hands!'

The Mother's life of motherliness and spiritual ministration may be considered from one point of view as only emanations from the basic fact of her divinity. True it is that the Hindu scriptures enjoin the worship of mothers and spiritual teachers as divinities. But in the life we are pursuing, the devotees came face to face with such superhuman pity, piety, purity, protective power, etc., that irrespective of what the scriptures might enjoin, they instinctively offered their heart-felt devotion and allegiance at the feet of this extraordinary personage who appeared to them as none other than the Universal Mother. Naturally, these expressions of love and adoration had nothing in them of deliberate formalities, but only of a spontaneous hankering for taking shelter under her and opening out their minds for her to read and to guide them as she would.

Some saw the Mother as a goddess in dreams, which, however, appeared to them nonetheless real on that account. A woman disciple named Sumati dreamt that she was worshipping the Mother as the goddess Chandi by offering her a cloth with a broad, red border. She then came to the Mother with such a piece of cloth, but as she could not express her desire out of shyness, she communicated the anecdote to the Mother through an intermediary. On hearing this the Mother smiled and said, 'The Universal Mother sent you the dream, don't you agree, my dear? Well, give me the cloth; it has to be worn anyway.' She wore it that very night (third week of October 1918) as it was holy to Lakshmi, the goddess of fortune. In the evening there came an old woman with all the accessories for the worship of the goddess and with these she adored the Mother, and then saluted her after offering an anna at her feet. The Mother said to the others present, 'Alas! She is in great tribulation, my dears, she is very poor.' The woman's only son had become insane after graduation and was nowhere to be traced; and the husband too was as good as mad because of that shock. The Mother blessed her sincerely.

Some may argue that though the Mother practically admits her divinity in the two foregoing instances, yet this avowal is so inextricably mixed up with her solicitousness for avoiding any disappointment in the minds of the devout or afflicted souls, that such examples should not be cited as indubitable proofs of her admission of divinity. Still we have to remember that we are engaged in this book in depicting the Mother's character in full; and we ask our devout readers not to leave this interesting pursuit all of a sudden, but to comprehend her personality in all its variety and amplitude. We are in the presence of a life above and beyond the human level, in the comprehension of which reverence is more helpful than rashness, and faith more than a frivolous display of one's intelligence. That is how our progress will be ensured, and we shall be vouchsafed more eloquent revelations.

The Mother was once coming to Jayrambati from Kamarpukur long after the passing away of the Master. Her nephew Sivaram, who was then very young, followed her with a bundle of clothes. When they reached the field in the vicinity of Jayrambati, some idea crossed Sivaram's mind and he stood still. The Mother, not knowing his mood, proceeded a little and then, missing the sound of his footsteps, looked back to find him motionless. She said with amazement, 'What's the matter, Sivu? Come forward.' 'If you tell me one thing,' said brother Sivaram, 'then only shall I proceed.' 'What's that?' inquired the Mother. 'Will you tell me who you are?' put in Sivaram. 'Who should I be? I am your aunt,' pleaded the Mother. 'Then go,' said Sivaram nonchalantly. 'Here you are near your house. I won't proceed further.' The sun was setting; and so in a worried tone the Mother said, 'Look at that! Who can I indeed be, my dear? I am a woman, your aunt.' 'Very good,' persisted Sivaram. 'You can as well go.' Finding Sivaram still standing at his post, the Mother said at last, 'People say, I am Kali.' To be doubly sure Sivaram asked, 'Kali? Truly so?' The Mother said, 'Yes.' That delighted Sivaram, and he said, 'Now, come, let us go.' Then he followed her to the village.

On hearing that the Mother would be starting for Calcutta in the middle of February 1920, Sivaram came to her one day at about eleven o'clock and told her after saluting her that he would not return that day to Kamarpukur, as he had finished all work for the day at the shrine of Raghuvira including worship and laying Him to sleep. This displeased the Mother, and she asked him to return that very day to do those things over again according to traditional form and in proper time. And she told Brahmachari Varada to pack up for him some fruits and vegetables. At three in the afternoon she called Varada again to instruct him to accompany Sivaram with the bundle up to the river Amodar. This he did. But a little later, Sivaram was seen crying with his head on the Mother's feet

‘Mother, tell me what will be my lot? Do tell me.’ The Mother said, ‘Sivu, get up; why should you worry? You have served the Master so much, and how greatly he loved you! What anxiety need you have? You are already free even in this life.’ But Sivaram persisted, ‘No, you take over my burden, and tell me if you are really what you earlier told me you were.’ The more the Mother consoled him and patted him touching his head and chin, the more he cried and said, ‘Assure me whether you have accepted all my burden, and whether you are Mother Kali Herself.’ The Mother had been moved by Sivaram’s tears and tenacity; now his yearning produced so great a change in her that it struck Varada standing by her, that she was at that moment no human being. In that elevated state she laid her hand on Sivaram’s head and said solemnly, ‘Yes, that’s so.’ Sivaram at once lifted his head and kneeling before her chanted with folded hands the *mantra* of salutation from the *Chandi*, ‘*Sarva-mangala-mangalye*,’ etc. The Mother kissed him by touching his chin with her hand; and he wiped away his tears and started for Kamar-pukur, his eyes beaming with delight, and the bundle of fruits and vegetables under his arm. At the Mother’s bidding, Varada went for the second time to help him with the bundle up to the river. Outside the village Sivaram turned happily towards Varada and said, ‘Brother, Mother is Kali Herself. She’s the wielder of people’s destiny; through her grace comes freedom. Do you understand?’

At this stage, the Mother declares her divinity not only indirectly through action, but also by word of mouth. If it be contended that even here the avowal is not voluntary inasmuch as it was occasioned by Sivaram’s obstinacy, then we may point out that the third person who happened to be there did not understand the Mother’s declaration as mere empty words for mollifying Sivaram. Rather he accepted it as a solemn and sincere avowal. Moreover, on the second occasion the Mother was not helpless; she could afford to deny; and such denials were

not quite unknown. Whenever a devotee's assertion seemed to be nothing more than idle fancy or baser sycophancy, the Mother never stooped to encourage such morbid sentimentalism, but rather denounced it severely, though there, too, a discriminating mind could discern the underlying truth that her depreciation was not tantamount to a denial of divinity, but emphasized her preference for playing the human role more thoroughly for some reasons best known to herself.

In her everyday dealings, the unassuming Mother claimed no higher position for herself than that of an ordinary mortal consecrated to the service of the Master; and that fact she impressed indelibly on all who came into contact with her. After initiation she pointed to the Master and said, 'He it is that is the guru.' In the course of conversation her divine mood might steal upon her surreptitiously; yet in the work-a-day world she never consciously allowed it any sway. When one day during her last illness, an old woman devotee began eulogizing her by saying, 'You are the Mother of the Universe, you are all', there descended on the devotee this burst of harsh rebuff, 'Tut, tut, "Mother of the Universe!" I am what I am just because he granted me refuge at his feet through his mercy. "You are the Mother of the Universe, you are such-and-such!" Get out of this place.' In fact, though she was too soft to touch anyone in matters of belief, she could never tolerate flattery.

One day at Jayrambati, the portion dealing with the Master's marriage was being read from the Bengali poetical work *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Punthi* before the Mother and some others, on the verandah of her house. As that portion depicted her as the Mother of the Universe and was eloquent with her praise, she left the place.

Before starting for the South, the Mother was, one noon, sitting absent-mindedly at Kothar and thinking alone about the miseries of the world and the Master's repeated incarnations for its redemption. When an attendant came

there, she said to him, 'So the Master comes again and again — the same moon every night. There's no escape, he is caught in it. As they say,

Coming many a time and oft, you get sorrows upon sorrows;
And how long still would you endure this pain?

Is that the lot only of men? It is that of the Master as well. So I have been thinking. I see no end to this. What suffering for the Master! Who will understand?' The attendant suggested, 'Why of the Master alone, Mother? It's yours, too. The Master and you are really one.' 'Fie!' admonished the Mother. 'Should one utter such a thing, my foolish boy! I am only his servant. Did you not read, "You are the mechanic, and I the machine; you the housewife, and I the house; I work as you make me do"? The Master is all; there's none but he.'

Some readers may be thinking, 'This much is enough for us to draw our own inference: "The Mother did not think of herself as an avatar nor did she preach this. The Master alone is the avatar. But the Mother deserves a very high position in the religious history of the world by her being the consort of the Master, the spiritual guide of many, and a dynamic centre of inspiration for the life divine."' We would plead with such readers for a little more patience and indulgence; for the logic of events forces us further ahead. In illustrations of this we may cite the case of Sailabala Chaudhury who asked the Mother, 'Mother, you instructed me as to how I should do the *japa* of the Master's name; how shall I do yours?' The Mother replied, 'You may do so (thinking of me) as Radha or any other (goddess) — in fact, under any guise you find convenient. If you can't conceive of me as anybody else, it will do to think (of me) as simply the Mother.' On another occasion she said to a disciple, 'Now that you have come here, you must have done so with some special attitude; you might have come thinking (of me) as the Universal Mother.'

There are many instances of such tacit disclosures in the course of events or of conversations. In 1919, when

Varada was bringing Doctor Prabhakar Mukherji from Arambagh for the treatment of the mother of the widow of Navasan, then on her death-bed at Koalpara, Sri Manindra Bose of the same town accompanied them in a bullock-cart. The scorching midday sun made them all thirsty and so Manindra requested Varada to obtain from the adjoining village some cucumbers and watery roots. Varada searched from door to door, but failed to get these fruits or roots; and then he plucked some green mangoes from a wayside tree, which were so sour that none but village-folk could touch them. 'Where are the roots?' inquired Manindra. Varada replied in fun, 'When no cucumber or root could be had even after ransacking the village, then suddenly the memory of the Treta-yuga bounced upon my mind, and I threw stones to pluck the mangoes.¹ Now you can quench your thirst at will.' Needless to say, that without salt nobody could utilize those fruits. When they reached Koalpara and related the whole incident to the Mother, she smiled broadly and said, 'Yes, my boys, "Each belongs to his own (fold) and incarnates as such in every age." How can I have all these works of mine done unless they are there? Depending on them I have been living here in this forest, amidst dangers, with Radhu in her present condition.'

One day at the end of 1909, a monastic disciple was regretting to the Mother that even after so much of experience and experiment, he had not been able to believe her to be his own mother. The Mother assured him, 'If not your own (mother), why should you be coming so often?' "Each belongs to his own (fold) and incarnates as such in every age." (I am) your own mother, as you will recognize in time.'

In domestic dealings or conversations with common people there were sudden disclosures of this real nature

1. According to Hindu mythology there are four ages—Satya (golden), Treta, Dvapara, and Kali (iron). Ramachandra and his wife were born in the Treta-yuga and had the monkeys as their followers and soldiers. Varada here likens himself to one of those tricky monkeys.

of the Mother. During her last stay at Jayrambati, the woman who served as cook came to her one night at nine o'clock to say that she had touched a dog. As touching the dog is polluting according to the Hindus, she would have to bathe in that winter night. The Mother said, 'Don't bathe so late in the night. Wash your hands and feet and change the cloth.' But she protested, 'How can that suffice?' The Mother suggested, 'Then take Ganges water.' But as this too was not adequately purifying according to the cook, the Holy Mother, who was holiness itself, said at last, 'Then touch me.' This opened the eyes of the cook, and for the time being she was saved from her mania for purity, as also from an uncomfortable cold bath.

When the Mother was engaged in her worship at the 'Udbodhan', the mad aunt went on abusing her. After the worship, the Mother looked at her and said, 'What a lot of persons there are who meditate and perform austerity and yet can't get me; and you miss me even though you have got me!' At Banaras the mad aunt had cursed the Mother the whole night, saying, 'Let my sister-in-law depart, let my sister-in-law die.' With reference to this the Mother said in the morning, 'My youngest sister-in-law does not know that I am deathless.'

Self-revelation and self-concealment alternate in the unfolding of the Mother's life. From distant parts people pour in to worship her as a goddess and yet the villagers understand nothing of this — to them she is ever their aunt, their sister, or niece, and nothing more. Once a villager, put the question to her, 'So many people come to see you from such distant lands; and yet why can't we understand you?' The Mother replied, 'What does it matter, if you can't? You are my friends, and so I am yours.' The village watchman Ambika said, 'People call you goddess, deity, and what not; as for us, we understand nothing of that.' The Mother said, 'Why need you understand? You are my brother Ambika and I am your sister Sarada.' She

kept herself informed of the weal and woe of the villagers and identified herself with these. Once a monk, who had just returned from famine relief activities in the Bankura district, was giving to the Mother an account of the work done by the Ramakrishna Mission. After hearing him through, she moved her hand in a circle around and said, 'Mind you, my son, by the grace of Mother Simhavahini, there's nothing of all this (distress) within this area (Jayrambati).' The monk said, 'I know nothing of Simhavahini. It's because of your presence that there is nothing of that here.' The Mother kept silent.

Harassed by the tyranny of her relatives, she said one day at Jayrambati, 'I warn you, don't you molest me too much. If the being that is within this body should once raise its hood, then not even Brahma, Vishnu, or Maheshwara will have any power to save you.' At another time she said to a devotee with reference to Radhu's behaviour at Koalpara, 'I tell you, my daughter, know this body (pointing to her own) to be divine. How much more of mortification can this put up with? Can anyone but the Deity endure so much? I tell you, my dear, none of them will understand me so long as I am here; they will understand everything hereafter.'

How can mere mortals cognize the Goddess who descended as a woman, unless She Herself made it known? The Great Mother descends on earth to teach people love and devotion; but in consideration of the limited faculty of man, She has to cover up Her divinity sufficiently to make it appealing and comprehensible to the human heart and intellect. And as a result of the interplay of these opposing factors; She continues to be unrevealed to the generality of men; and only a fortunate few can understand Her. One day (September 1918) Nalini Devi asked the Mother before two women disciples, 'Well, aunt, people call you the Indwelling Entity; are you really so?' The Mother only smiled a little. But when Nalini pressed her question again, she said, 'They say so out of devotion. Who indeed

can I be, my dear? The Master is all. You pray to the Master so that I may not fall a victim to egotism.' This humility and attempt at self-concealment made one of the women devotees burst out laughing, and in the course of the conversation she remarked, 'There are many who call the Mother, the Universal Mother; but the Master alone knows how deep any one's faith is. In the mouths of unbelieving people this sounds like parrot-like repetition.' The Mother joined in the laugh and said, 'That's true enough, my dear.' The woman further said that none could understand the Mother unless she made herself known out of her mercy. And then she added, 'And yet the Mother's divinity consists in this that in her there's no trace of egoism. All mortals are full of self-conceit. See, for instance, how thousands of people prostrate themselves at her feet calling her, "You are Lakshmi, you are the Mother of the Universe." If the Mother were a mortal, this would puff her up with pride. Can a mere mortal digest so much of honour?' The Mother only cast a smiling glance at the devotee.

We now turn to an incident of the old Dakshineswar days. Yogin-Ma had then become very intimate with the Mother. One day the Mother asked her, 'Yogin, do you worship with dry *bel* leaves?' Yogin-Ma used to pluck green *bel* leaves from the trees at Dakshineswar and offer them in her worship even after they became dry; and hence she replied, 'Yes, Mother. But how could you know this?' Cheerfully the Mother said, 'This morning during meditation I saw you offering dry *bel* leaves to m...', and without completing the word she quickly concluded, 'during your worship.' The intelligent Yogin-Ma looked astonished at the Mother, who blushed and held her in a warm embrace. That created in the latter's mind the impression of her own daughter Ganu holding her in her arms; and not knowing what she did, she held the Mother fast to her bosom and kissed her. When she returned to her senses she saluted the Mother and took the dust of her feet. The

Mother also left the place and stood out on the verandah of the Nahabat.

When the inquirer belonged to a high level of spirituality, the Mother admitted her divinity without reservation. Once Swami Tanmayananda worshipped the Mother's feet at Jayrambati and placed them over his head. But the Mother forbade him to do so, explaining that the Master stays in the head, God Himself sits on the thousand-petalled lotus there. The Swami at once asked her, 'If the Master is God Himself, who are you then?' Without the least hesitation the Mother replied, 'Who else should I be? I, too, am the Divine Mother.'

In this connection we recollect her placing her own photograph by the side of the Master's at Koalpara and worshipping both, of which we have written earlier.

During the Christmas holidays of 1910, a candidate for initiation offered flowers at the Mother's feet at Kothar and then presented her a piece of cloth and a rupee. The Mother declined the gift saying, 'You are in straitened circumstances and have your own wants. Why, then, this offering?' The devotee explained that the money belonged to the Mother; and if a little portion of a son's earning could be utilized for the service of his mother, he should feel thankful.' At this the Mother said, 'Ah! What love, my dear, what love!' The devotee had heard from others, 'The Mother is Kali Herself, the Primal Energy, the Deity.' He wanted a confirmation of this from the Mother herself; for the *Gita* speaks of such a self-avowal. Hence he said to the Mother, 'I believe what I have heard of you. Yet if you yourself tell me so, I can be free from any lingering doubt. I want to learn from your own words, whether that is true.' The Mother said, 'Yes, it is so.'

In 1913, at Jayrambati, Radhu fell ill after Bhudev's marriage, and the Mother was by her side, feeding her with milk, when the mad aunt came and sat near by. Radhu did not want her 'Bad mummy' to be there and so she pushed her a little, when, as chance would have it, the

aunt's feet touched the Mother's hand slightly. This disrespect shown to the Mother, unintentional though it was, made the aunt uneasy, and instead of laying the blame on herself she shifted it to the Mother and said, 'Why did you touch my feet with your hand? Dear me! What will now be my lot!' The Mother laughed heartily at this queer expostulation. Brahmachari Rashbihari, who was there, said, 'Though the mad one abuses and dishonours the Mother, she is yet afraid of touching the Mother's hand with her feet!' The Mother explained, 'My son, didn't Ravana know that Rama was none other than Brahman in Its fullness — Narayana Himself; and that Sita was the Primal Energy — Mother of the Universe?¹ Yet he came to play that part! Does she not know me? She knows everything, and yet she comes to play this role.'

Out of consideration for certain devotees she seemed to be unconsciously revealing her true stature. When Vaikuntha went to see the Mother at Kamarpukur, Ramlaḥ and Lakshmi Devi were also there. At the time of bidding good-bye to the devotee the Mother suddenly said, 'Vaikuntha, call on me!' and the next moment she checked herself and said, 'Call on the Master; calling on him means calling on all.' Lakshmi Devi who heard it all, protested, 'No, Mother, should you speak thus? This is very wrong on your part. If you wheedle the boys thus, what will they do?' The Mother pleaded, 'Why, what have I done?' Lakshmi Devi replied, 'This very moment you told Vaikuntha, "Call on me," and again you say, "Call on the Master."' The Mother argued, 'Calling on the Master is certainly as good as calling on all.' Not silenced by the Mother's logic, Lakshmi Devi impressed it on Vaikuntha that what he had heard that day from the Mother was very valuable; it was a declaration as well as

1. Ravana, the demon king of Sri Lanka abducted Sita, and Rama killed him. In his previous birth Ravana was a door-keeper of Narayana in heaven, but owing to the curse of an offended brahmin he fell and was born as Ravana. Narayana incarnated as Rama and killed him.

a direction by the Mother herself, so that Vaikuntha should call on the Mother. The Mother listened without further objection.

A woman devotee asked, 'Why can we not realize that you are the Goddess?' The Mother replied, 'Can all and sundry do so, my dear? There lay a piece of diamond on a flight of steps (of a tank). Every one took it for an ordinary stone, rubbed his feet against it after bath and went away. One day a jeweller came to those steps and discovered that it was an exceptionally large and priceless diamond.' How few discovered the real stature of the Mother! To whom, therefore, was she to disclose her identity; and even if she did so, who would believe her? Hence her references to this fact seemed, often enough, halting or ambiguous. And yet at times, there was no hesitation, she avowed her divinity then frankly enough. Kedar said once, 'Mother, nobody will care for the goddesses Shashthi, Sitala, etc., after you.' The Mother replied, 'Why should they not? They are only my own parts.' Another day, Kedar was talking with the Mother at the Jagadamba-Ashrama at Koalpara, when some people came to offer worship to Shashthi under a nearby banyan tree to the accompaniment of beating of drums. As this interfered with the conversation, Kedar said in disgust, 'Ah! Why don't you stop, my fellows!' The Mother at once interceded, 'How you behave, Kedar! I indeed am all! Why do you get irritated?'

Now we proceed to record some incidents from the Mother's life which were not only authentic evidences of her divine power according to the devotees who personally witnessed them but were calculated to intensify other people's faith and devotion and thus help their spiritual development. These may not appear as so very presentable or noteworthy to people who are swayed by modern rationality and so-called scientific outlook; they may be considered devitalizing and interdictable by the shrewd politicians who aim at basing society on mere ethics and

utility. We are also aware that in the lives and teachings of the Master, the Mother, and their blessed children, spirituality in its purest form had the pride of place while supernormal powers were considered as unwelcome intruders. Yet as impartial biographers, we cannot ignore these facts. While presenting these, we leave the readers free to evaluate them and ascertain their meaning according to their personal likes and dislikes. Such anecdotes are to be met with in superhuman characters all over the world and in all ages. People round whose lives spread such ideas and beliefs must have something unique in them. We frankly admit without any hesitation that we cannot prove to others' satisfaction the genuineness of these facts. But if some people cannot be convinced of the truth, there is no reason why we should reject the testimony of others. This is the only excuse under which we take shelter here.

Professor Gokuladas De, then studying for the B. A. degree, once fell ill and as a consequence stopped going to the college for some time. Master Mahashaya took this opportunity to teach him to read the *Chandi* in a sweet musical tone; and Gokuldas soon learnt it. One day, when out on the morning walk by the Ganges, he found the Mother sitting rapt in *japa* and meditation on the lowest of the steps leading down to the water. Gokuldas began chanting the verses of the *Chandi* in his newly acquired tune in such a low voice that there was no possibility of his being heard by the Mother from so far below. When he intoned the verse, 'Saumya - saumya - tarasesha - saumye - bhyas - tvatisundari'¹, the Mother turned back to find the devotee there, raised both her hands in token of blessing, and then got merged in her *japa* again.

The professor records another experience thus: 'During the few years that I had acquaintance with her (Mother), she never asked me such questions as where

1. 'Charming, more charming than all charming things; yea surpassingly beautiful.' *Chandi* (I. 81).

my house was, how I was engaged, how many brothers we were, or who my father was. But one day when I went to salute her, it was astonishing to hear her mention by names my two brothers and ask how they were. As she referred to one of them as Nalin instead of Lalit, I thought that it was a slip of tongue and I smiled. But when I told this fact to my mother on returning home, she said, "The Mother of the Universe has spoken correctly. His name as a boy was Nalin which was afterwards changed to Lalit".' (*Udbodhan*, Paush, December-January, 1937-38).

R. one day prayed, as he massaged the Mother's rheumatic feet with an oil, that the disease might be transferred to his body and the Mother be cured. The Mother smiled indulgently and said, 'What are you thinking, my boy? May you live long. I have grown old; how much longer should I live? Should one think like that? May the Master grant you a long life.' And she blessed him by touching his head.

At one time in 1918, Sri Lalitmohan Saha became so depressed in mind that, becoming angry with the Master and the Mother, he resolved not to visit the Mother any more. But pressed by friends, he had to go to the 'Udbodhan'. That day many devotees saluted the Mother, with none of whom she talked. Last of all she saw her petulant devotee and asked him, 'Are you well?' Ironically he replied, 'Yes, Mother, very well, indeed!' In answer the Mother smiled benignly on him and said endearingly, 'How's that, my boy! That is the nature of the mind. Should one behave like this just because of that?'

In 1915, when Sri Mahendranath Gupta reached Jayrambati, he had it in his mind to worship the Mother's feet with flowers and sandal-paste, though he could not imagine how he could procure these in an unknown place. Just then the Mother sent him some flowers and sandal-paste through a little niece of hers, through whom also she told him, 'If that boy wants to offer flowers, he can come now to do so.'

Swami Tanmayananda, while on his way from Koalpara to Jayrambati, thought within himself that if he could do some little service to the Mother he would be fortunate. Reaching there he found her sitting with her legs stretched and a pot of oil nearby. Tanmayananda began massaging her feet with the oil, and the Mother instructed him as to how each part of the legs was to be rubbed. When the devotee had served her in this manner to his heart's content for about twenty-five minutes, the Mother said, 'I hope you are now satisfied. Let me now go in for bath; I have to worship the Master.'

One afternoon, Praphullamukhi Bose found on reaching the 'Udbodhan' that the widow of Navasan was bringing in the Mother's quilt, mattress, etc., from the terrace, inserting them into their covers and then spreading the bed. She thought within herself, 'If I could but get this work to do!' As soon as the widow of Navasan left, the Mother entered the room and glancing at the bed said, 'Do you notice, my daughter, how she has muddled everything! She has used one cover for another. You, my good girl, change the covers and do the bed over again.' Praphullamukhi had her wish fulfilled.

One day, in July, Swami Mahadevananda went to Haldi-pukur at the Mother's bidding to purchase some kerosene oil, flour, etc., weighing altogether more than eighty pounds. As the Mother had not asked him to engage any bearer, he carried the load on his head. The road was slushy and slippery and the load seemed to become heavier at every step, till at last he could bear it no longer. Nevertheless, he resolved not to yield to any weakness; and astonishingly enough, as he stepped forward with this determination and cleared a hurdle immediately in front, the burden became lighter, so that he covered the remaining distance without any trouble. But this sudden change set him thinking about the cause; and as he entered the Mother's house in a pensive mood, he found her pacing up and down her verandah with a flushed face and scared

eyes, and saying to herself, 'Why did I not ask him to engage a porter?' When Mahadevananda took down the burden, she said, 'You should have taken a porter. What did it matter if I had not said so? Should one walk that way?'

Some incidents prove her foresight and premonition. When Vaikuntha was going away from Jayrambati after paying his respects to the Mother, she said, 'You go home straight from here; you needn't now go to the (Belur) Math or anywhere else. Go home and serve your parents; this is the time for serving your father.' At the time of leaving home Vaikuntha had seen his father in normal health; but on returning there, he found him on his death-bed. The old man passed away in a week's time.

Swami Mahadevananda went to Jayrambati from Koalpara with a basket of vegetables. When he was about to return, the Mother forbade him saying, 'Don't go; it will rain soon.' The Swami paid no heed and started after some light refreshment. The Mother followed him outside to show him the clouds in the sky; but there was not a single patch, Mahadevananda saluted her and laughed heartily as he walked on. But as he crossed the Amodar and was in the open field of Dessera he was caught in such a heavy shower that he was completely drenched and had to run for shelter into the house of a low-caste poor man.

The Mother was busy packing her things on the day preceding the Durga worship of 1912; for she was to start for Banaras just after the festival. At noon the sister of the poet-dramatist Girishchandra Ghosh came to make her obeisance. When taking leave she said, 'Good-bye, Mother.' Absent-mindedly the Mother replied, 'Yes, you can go.' As soon as she had descended the steps, the Mother thought, 'What an evil thing I have uttered, I said "go"¹! I never speak to anybody thus.' As ill luck would have it, that lady passed away that very night. The news made the

1. Indians, when taking leave, say, 'May I come now?' and the answer given is, 'Yes, you may come.' They do not use 'go' in this context under

Mother extremely sorry and she said, 'What a pity that such a thing slipped out of my lips!'

The Mother initiated Sri Hemchandra Dasgupta at Jayrambati and taught him how to keep count of the number of *japa* with the fingers. But as he could not master the process, she said, 'You will learn it from Suren.' Suren Babu then lived at Ranchi and Hem Babu would be going to his own post at Chittagong, the two places being diametrically opposite. Hence he said, 'How can that be?' The Mother simply said, 'Well, it will somehow come to pass.' And most astonishingly, they met each other in the steamer at Goalunda—Suren Babu was going from Ranchi to Dacca.

Before the passing away of the Master's disciple Purnachandra Ghosh, the Mother remarked at seeing his mother coming to her at the 'Udbodhan', 'There she comes. What does she mean by coming to vex me every day saying, "Mother bestow your blessing, cure Purna"? I know it as a certainty that Purna won't recover; yet to console them I have to say that he will.' That day, too, Purnachandra's mother saluted the Mother, repeated her prayer and had in return a few words of solace. When she left, the Mother remarked, 'The Master had warned. "He won't live long if he is married." She didn't mind it then; she hurriedly married him, lest he should become a monk.' Some days later, the Mother, Yogin-Ma, and others lay down for rest after the evening service, and the Mother fell asleep. Suddenly she started up and said, 'Is Purna dead, Yogin?' Much astonished, Yogin-Ma asked 'Who told you, Mother?' The Mother replied, 'I was asleep and I suddenly heard somebody saying that Purna had died.' Yogin-Ma then confirmed that the mishap had really occurred in the afternoon (November 1913) though she had not been informed. That night the Mother kept on sorrowing for this beloved disciple of the Master.

the belief that to permit 'to go' is as good as asking one to depart from this life.

The Mother's blessing for her disciples was infallible. Sri Purnachandra Bhaumik was once in some great difficulty in his service, which might lead to his being gaoled. He related the whole affair to the Mother, who, however, held out the hope, 'There's no cause for fear; you need have no anxiety.' He soon overcame the difficulty.

Sri Surendranath Roy of Barisal was once attacked with a deadly disease which was diagnosed as tuberculosis and his life was despaired of. But he had a strong desire to see the Mother before he left this world. Accordingly, he invited her through a letter. In response the Mother sent him a photograph of hers with a bound volume of the Bengali magazine *Udbodhan*; and she wrote that though it was not possible for her to be personally present, he should look at her photograph and read the volume; furthermore that he would recover from the disease. Surendranath found the real Mother there in the photograph, which he kept at his head. He soon came round.

Owing to continuous drought the crops in the fields of Jayrambati and the neighbouring villages began to be scorched away. The helpless and scared farmers told the Mother. 'This year, Mother, there's no hope of keeping our children alive—all will have to die of hunger.' Their distress moved her, and she went with them to look at the fields. There she could not control her feeling of dismay, and supplicated with extreme humility, 'Alas, Master! What's this that you have done! Should every one die of starvation after all?' That very night rain poured down in torrents and the crop was so successful that year that the peasants had no such happy memory for many years past.

In November 1918, a Brahmachari from Koalpara came down to the groundfloor of 'Udbodhan' at about 10 p.m. at the call of Swami Saradananda to find Sri Napharchandra Kole of his village waiting to make obeisance to the Mother. According to the Swami's direction the Brahmachari informed the Mother and led the old gentleman to her. There Napharchandra held the

feet of the Mother with both hands and with his eyes full of tears said, 'Mother, I have come to you as I am in imminent danger. Some of my grand-daughters and a grandson have died of influenza. And now some more grand-daughters and the only surviving grandson are in precarious condition. Mother, you will have to so ordain it that my line is not broken.' The Mother said, 'Dear me! Why should you be so apprehensive? You are a blessed and fortunate man.' But he still pleaded, 'No, Mother, I don't want to hear such platitudes. May I not have to suffer the pangs of separation from my grandson.' Thus he spoke and wept holding on to her feet all the time. The Mother said, 'Don't you be overwhelmed; please get up. Very well, I shall pray to the Master.' Napharchandra still implored till at last the Mother uttered in a solemn voice, 'No, you need have no fear.' That comforted the gentleman; he wiped his tears and went down. The Mother sent two sweet dishes for him, which he accepted, and departed happily. He had his wish fulfilled.

Kshirodebala Roy was a widow from an early age. About a year before she became widowed, she was one day dressing some green papaw for the kitchen, when the juice of the fruits affected her fingers which had been injured a little earlier while getting the nails pared by a barber; so that the fingers became swollen and later developed sores which lasted for some twelve years. Though at times the sores seemed to subside a little, they flared up virulently when in contact with water. After she became acquainted intimately with the Mother she had one of those attacks. She decided, on coming to the Mother one day, that she would not touch her feet with the hands while bowing down to her. But as she noticed another lady wrapping up her hands with the hem of her cloth and touching the Mother's feet reverentially with those covered hands, she too decided to follow that method, though with herself this was a novelty. This unusual procedure, however, did not escape the careful eyes of the Mother, who questioned Kshirodebala

and found out the truth. But instead of taking offence, she said tenderly, 'My daughter, such is the condition with me nowadays, that I am ever engaged with myself and do not look much to your needs. You worship the Master with this hand, and that's why the sore persists. Anyway, come with me. Be quick, for they will soon carry away for throwing into the Ganges the flowers etc., that were offered to the Master and the water in which his feet were washed.' Going to another room she said, 'There you see, there are all those things in that *Kamandalu* (ascetic's water-pot). Insert the whole palm into it.' That being done she said, 'The hand will have no more ailment. But try to avoid touching fish, meat, garlic, and onion as far as you can; for you can't avoid touching these altogether.¹ If you handle these things, there may be a little recurrence of sores. You will be worshipping the Master daily, as a matter of course. When there are those sores, apply the water with which you wash the Master's feet.' Kshirodebala got cured by following this treatment. Whenever there was a recrudescence later on, the touch of the holy water cured her immediately.

When Brajeshwari Devi went to Jayrambati for initiation, she had on her arm a silver amulet as a preventive against hysteria. She had fits whenever anybody reminded her of the disease, which lasted for a week or so, the fits starting at evening and continuing long into the night. The sight of the amulet roused the inquisitiveness of the mad aunt. But, intervening, the Mother said that the devotee might have worn it because of some disease, and she should not be embarrassed by useless questions. Then she said to Brajeshwari, 'My daughter, you need not wear the amulet any longer. This disease will leave you even without your wearing it.' In fact, she had no attack after this, not even when attending cases of hysteria.

1. She had to cook for her relatives, though she herself was a strict vegetarian like all orthodox widows.

THE MOTHER AND THE MASTER

We have discussed how the Master looked upon the Mother. Now we shall try to understand how the Mother estimated the Master. For this we have no great need to turn back to the Dakshineswar and Cossipore days though for bringing out the essential ideological factors we may have to retrace our steps a little. For the rest we shall keep our vision directed in front.

One day, as the Master sat on his smaller cot in his room at Dakshineswar, and there was none except the Mother who was sweeping the floor, she suddenly asked him, 'Who am I to you?' Without the least hesitation the Master replied, 'You are my Blissful Mother.' Again, when Hridaya one day asked the Mother banteringly, 'Aunt, don't you call my uncle your father', the impromptu answer came from her lips, 'Why do you speak of him as father only? He is mother, father, friend, relative, acquaintance, my nearest and dearest, and everything.' As the Master considered the Mother to be the Divine Mother, the Master was to her the embodiment of all the gods and goddesses; and this she once openly declared by saying, 'He is the goddess Manasa and Ganga, and all.'

It was the second week of June 1913. Dr. Durgapada Ghosh and Sri Surendranath Bhaumik were having a little talk with the Mother before leaving her village home. Surendranath submitted that he had a little difficulty in worshipping the Master, for though he had a vague idea about the identity of the Master with his own chosen Goddess, and so he could worship his chosen Goddess in the picture of the Master, yet he was faced with an incongruity every time he tried to utter the *mantra*, 'With your grace, O Great Goddess, etc.,' at the time of dedicating the fruits of his *japa* to the deity on the completion of the worship. The Mother replied with a hearty laugh, 'Well, my boy, he himself is both the Great God and the Great

Goddess. He is in all the deities and he dwells in all the creatures. One can worship all the gods and goddesses in and through him. You may as well call him the Great God as the Great Goddess.' Another day (end of March 1920), she said to a lady devotee, 'He is everything. He is the Purusha (the Supreme consciousness) and he is the Prakriti (the Primordial Energy). From him everything will flow.' At Jayrambati the Mother at the time of initiating a devotee, asked him to offer at the Master's feet all his works, virtues and vices, merits and demerits; and then pointing to the Master as his guru she gave him the *mantra*. But the devotee thought, 'If the Master is the guru, what is the Mother then?' For he could not realize that the two were but one. And hence he asked her, 'How am I to think on the Master?' The Mother solemnly reiterated, 'He is all—Purusha and Prakriti. If you think on him, you have thought of all.' To a lady devotee the Mother said, 'In the Master are all the deities—not even (the goddesses) Sitala and Manasa excluded.'

At one time they used to bring for her from the temple of Siddheshwari at Baghbazar the water with which the deity had been bathed. One day, after the worship of the Master, Swami Vasudevananda brought to the Mother in two separate pots, the bath waters of the Master and Siddheshwari. 'Why two?' inquired the Mother. When the matter was explained she said, 'It's all one.' As Vasudevananda still held before her the two pots, she said, 'Mix them up.' 'I shall do so from tomorrow,' said the Swami. But the Mother insisted on these being poured into the same pot then and there, and she drank that mixed water.

We read in several Bengali works¹ that though the Mother was so very shy that she never went to the

1. *Sri Sri Latu Maharajer Smriti-Katha* (p. 278), *Sri Sri Sarada Devī* (p. 56), *Sri Ma* (p. 81), which slightly differ in unimportant details.

Master's room when any gentleman or even a devotee was there, yet when the Master passed away at Cossipore, she could contain herself no longer, but rushed to the room and cried out, 'Mother Kali, dear, for what fault of mine have you left me?'

From such statements and incidents, it appears clear to us that the Mother did not look upon the Master as a mere husband or man, nor even as an ordinary immortal; according to her, he was none other than the all-pervading God Himself. Hence her instruction to the devotees was, 'The Master is everything—he's the guru, he's the chosen Deity.' And about one of her experiences she told Sudhira Devi, 'I was in such a state at one time that I could not even drive away an ant from the food offered (in front of the Master), under the belief that the Master himself was eating it.'

She identified the Master with all the deities and all creation, including even an ant. And her conception of him transcended all forms and ascended to the formless Brahman. Though the Advaita Ashrama at Mayavati on the Himalayas is dedicated to non-dualism, the great Swami Vivekananda, during his visit there in early January 1901, found that a shrine-room containing the picture of Sri Ramakrishna had been established and that regular worship was being conducted with flowers, incense, and other paraphernalia. The Swami vehemently denounced this dualistic tendency but he did not order the discontinuance of the worship, as that would hurt the feelings of others. He rather believed that they would realize their mistake and rectify accordingly. The Swami's criticism had the desired effect, and the shrine was broken up. One who still doubted if it was right for him to profess himself a member of the Advaita Ashrama when he leaned towards dualism appealed to the Holy Mother as a final resort, only to receive the reply, 'Sri Ramakrishna was all Advaita and preached Advaita. Why should you not also follow Advaita? All his disciples are Advaitins.'

Just as the Master, though himself a doyen of Advaitins and ever established in non-dualism, found nothing incongruous in having apparently diverse attitudes towards Reality—non-dualistic, qualified non-dualistic, or dualistic—according to the level on which his mind worked for the time being, so also the Mother could offer worship to the Master at the same time that she knew him as the supreme Brahman. From her own account it appears that the first real worship of the Master originated with herself, just as the worship of Sri Chaitanya began with his wife Vishnu-priya who had the first image of her consort carved out of margosa wood and had it installed in a shrine. The Mother said that the first copy of the photograph of the Master that is now worshipped in thousands of homes, became so black that it had to be rejected and given to a brahmin of Dakshineswar at his request. When some time later the brahmin went away from the village, he left the photograph with the Mother, who placed it along with other deities and went on offering flowers and food. One day the Master entered the Nahabat and noticing the picture there, said, 'Hullo, dear, what's all this you are doing here?' The Mother, who was cooking under the staircase, came in, attracted by the Master's voice, to find him offering once or twice to that picture some of the *bel* leaves and other things that were there for worship. The owner of the picture never returned; and so it became the Mother's constant companion. It was dark at first, as we have said but gradually it became lighter. The Master got her daily worship. Even during long journeys, she had the picture with her, and made it a point to offer something to it. There was no sanctimoniousness about this worship, though there was enough of love and earnestness. At the time of worship it seemed as though she was sitting in his living presence and acting accordingly, with the greatest intimacy. We quote from one who witnessed this worship day in and day out:

‘The framed photograph of the Master rested on a wooden seat in a niche in the wall; and by its side were the image of the child Gopala, and one or two more pictures of other deities. In the morning after taking a little of Ganges water in hand the Mother roused the Master from his sleep—kept erect the picture that lay in sleep. Under the Master’s seat in a small brass *Kamandalu* was Ganges water, and near it were sandal-wood, a stone piece on which to make sandal-paste, a *panchapatra*, and some more paraphernalia for worship. After finishing the domestic duties, the Mother sat at about nine o’clock in the middle of the room, placing the Master in front. She bathed and worshipped him there with offerings of flowers, sandal-paste, fruits, sweets, syrup of sugar-candy, and *halva* (a sweet preparation made with sugar, butter, and semolina). Then she sat erect in meditation for some time with her hands on her lap. She devoted more time to this worship whenever she had no other special engagement; but she never took too long. She seemed to lose her ordinary consciousness during meditation, after which she made her obeisance to the Master and kept his picture in its previous position. At the end, she took a little of the water with which the Master’s feet had been washed, and little bits of *tulasi* and *bel* leaves, if there happened to be any. As flower was a rarity as Jayrambati she used them as often as she could get them. In the absence of flowers, *tulasi* leaves and water served her purpose. For *tulasi* she had a certain predilection which she expressed thus, “*Tulasi* is very pure; everything is sanctified if *tulasi* is there.” At noon, rice, soup of lentils, and vegetable curries were offered in the Master’s name in the kitchen. In the evening, again, she offered to him *luchi*, *chapati*, vegetable curry, milk, molasses, etc. There was no regularity as regards offerings in the afternoon. If any special thing came there by chance, it was offered at about four.’

This was all the formality. And then, as to intimacy, we learn that when she was leaving Koalpara for Calcutta

for the last time, Brahmachari Varada went to her room at five in the morning to find that she had finished worshipping the Master with fruits and sweets and was then saying to him while wrapping the picture with a cloth, 'Get up, it's time to start.' At another time, when the Mother was at Jayrambati, during Jagad-dhatri worship, a devotee found the Mother finishing the Master's worship early in the morning and then at the time of offering food to him saying, 'Mind you, Mother (Jagad-dhatri) is to be worshipped today. Do finish your meal early, for I shall have to go there.' On a third occasion, when there was talk of the Mother's going to her village from Calcutta, but because of the sickness of one or other of her retinue the date was being repeatedly deferred, she was heard saying to the Master, 'Let us go to Jayrambati. Don't you have any liking for the big tank and the *tulasi* leaves there?'

After the dedication of food to the Master, she actually saw him tasting it. When Dr. Lalbehari Sen was on a visit to Jayrambati in 1911, he fell ill. When convalescent, he was given a little *khichudi* as diet by the Mother. As the doctor hesitated, fearing that the food would do him harm, the Mother assured him that he need have no apprehension since the Master had partaken of it. At this the doctor queried, 'Can the Master be seen?' The Mother replied, 'Yes, nowadays he comes at times and wants to eat *khichudi* and cheese.' As somebody regretted at Koalpara that though food was offered to the Master, one could not know whether he accepted it or not, the Mother averred emphatically, 'There's no doubt that he does eat, my boy; if the dedication is made from the bottom of one's heart, he surely eats it.' And she added that when she calls the child Krishna for his meal, he goes to her jingling his anklets and eats with a childish clamour. In November 1914, a woman devotee on entering the chapel heard the Mother addressing the Master thus like a bashful newly married maiden, 'Come, come for food,' and

gentleman's doubts cleared up and he said with delight, 'Mother, now I have got it; you are the same as the Master—identical.' With the same serenity the Mother again said, 'Then eat.'

The Master comes down in every age and his Sakti, the divine Mother, accompanies him. She often pointed out this eternal relationship to the chosen few. Nalini Sarkar of Midnapore asked her once, 'Mother, did you come with all the incarnations?' 'Yes, my son,' replied the Mother.

When the Master comes to us again, his retinue will follow, and his Sakti, the Mother, will again incarnate, though this is by no means a happy development to contemplate. In the course of a conversation Gauri-Ma said one day (February 9, 1912) at the 'Udbodhan', 'The Master said that he would come down again twice; once in the form of a *baul*.¹' The Mother confirmed her by saying, 'Yes, the Master said, "You will have in your hands (my) hubble-hubble."' The Master will have a broken stone vessel in hand. Maybe, the cooking will be done in a broken iron pan. He walks on and on—neither looking to the right nor left.'

Ashutosh Roy, a devotee of Ranchi, had a vision of the Master, by whom he was called at night; and after opening the door he found the Master standing on the road with ochre cloth, wooden sandals on his feet, and a pair of tongs in his hand. A disciple reported the incident to the Mother at Jayrambati, in May 1913, and asked, 'Mother, why did he see him with wooden sandals on his feet and a pair of tongs in his hand?' The Mother replied, 'That's the outfit of a monk. For has he not said that he will come in the trappings of a *baul*? In the attire of a *baul*—with a

1. *Baul* is derived from the word *vatula*, meaning crazy. The *bauls* are a community of god-intoxicated mendicants who sing mystic songs to the accompaniment of *ektara*, an one-stringed musical instrument. They wear long robes often torn to pieces and almost touching the feet; and they do not pay heed to social customs and fineness of manners.

long robe, matted hair on the head, and beard so long. He said, "I shall go home by way of Burdwan; somebody's son will be easing himself on the road; in my hand will be a broken stone vessel, and a bag dangling under my arm." He will be walking on and on, and eating all the time—without looking in any particular direction.' The questioner asked, 'Why the Burdwan road?' The Mother replied, 'The home lies that way.' Again the question was put, 'Is he a Bengali then?' The Mother said, 'Yes, a Bengali. Hearing him I said, "How strange, my dear! What a strange fancy you have!" He smiled and said, "Yes, you will have my hubble-hubble in hand."'

Being told that the Master would again incarnate together with his companions and associates, Lakshmi Devi, his niece, swore, 'I will not be coming again even though I be chopped to pieces like tobacco leaves.' At this the Master replied with a smirk, 'Where will you be if I come away? You will be ill at ease. It's like a float of (the interlocking aquatic plant) *Kalmi*; if one pulls at one end, the whole mass moves.' The Mother, too, disliked the idea. At Vrindaban, when the Mother and the devotees had alighted from the train and Golap-Ma was reaching out their belongings from inside the compartment, she found the hubble-bubble of Latu (Swami Adbhutananda) lying in a corner. So she took it up and handed it over to the Mother. At once Lakshmi Devi twitted the Mother saying, 'There you have already taken in hand the hubble-bubble.' The Mother, too, said, 'Master, Master, here I have finished holding the hubble-bubble,' and she dropped it instantaneously to the ground with a thud.

The Mother told the disciples, 'He (the Master) said that he will live for a hundred years with his children.' According to her, the golden age began from the advent of the Master. He came with some extraordinary souls as his esoteric circle. For instance, the Master himself told her that Swami Vivekananda belonged to the group of the great seven seers of old and that Arjuna came as Swami Yoga-

nanda. Ordinary people are born and they die; but these highly gifted and illuminated souls accompany an incarnation to advance his mission. About their extraordinary spiritual calibre, she said 'All those who came earlier have come again.' And to her hearers she spoke with pride about the devotees of the inner circle, 'Don't you notice how childlike is Rakhal's (Brahmananda's) behaviour; even now he is like a little boy. And look at Sarat (Saradananda); what a lot of work he does, how many difficulties he shoulders, and yet he never complains. He is a holy man; why should he be doing all this? If they want, they can keep their minds fixed on God day and night. It's only for your sake that they continue on a lower plane. Keep their characters before your eyes, and serve them.' She considered these direct disciples of the Master as her own sons and said, 'Rakhal, Sarat, and others — all of them issued out of my very body.'

From a very remarkable statement about the Master's life as a whole it seems as though in the Mother's estimation the three phases in the Master's life — his *Lila* (play) as an incarnation, his spiritual practices, and his mission after realization — could be arranged in a graded scale. Of these, the first seemed to occupy the pride of place and last came his mission. An incarnation plays out of the fullness of spirit and every word or movement of his is calculated to stir up similar underlying emotions in gifted souls. Here there is no motive, but only living inspiration for others. In the second phase of spiritual practices, his movements seem to be more concretely correlated to, and circumscribed and determined by, his environment; and hence though his divine glory cannot find free play here, the very fact of conformity to human standards makes his life more widely appreciated. In the third phase of encompassing the general weal, all kinds of human factors intervene to shut out and refract the inner light; and here, though his divinity becomes deeply overlaid with humanity, his real mission as the incarnation of the

age is more widely fulfilled. On these matters the Mother said one day to Swami Keshavananda, 'I tell you, my son, it never occurred to me that he practised all the religions with the express *motive* of preaching the idea of spiritual harmony. He was always in his mood of divine ecstasy. He practised all the methods through which the Christians, Mohammedans, Vaishnavas, and others worship God and realize truth, and thereby he tasted God's disports in diverse ways. Days and nights passed by him without any notice. But what you should note, my dear, is that *renunciation* is his special message in this age. Did any one see such natural renunciation any time before? As for the harmony of religions you speak of, that also is true. In previous incarnations, all other spiritual moods looked insignificant because of the emphasis on a particular one.' The truth revealed is higher and more fundamental than either its method of realization or its subsequent promulgation and application. On another day she said to a second devotee, 'Men are ever forgetful of God. And hence, whenever the occasion demands, He comes down now and then to show the way to the worldly by following it Himself. This time He showed renunciation.' In fact, no attempt at world-regeneration can succeed unless it has selflessness as its basis; and without it the realization of God can never be dreamt of.

HER HUMAN PERSONALITY

It was April 1919. Seeing that the Mother wailed like the common people at the death of Maku's son, Neda, the minds of the devotees present at Koalpara were troubled with doubts. Hence, when saluting her next morning, Sri Narayana Iyengar, a great devotee from Mysore, asked her, 'Why did you cry like an ordinary mortal at the death of Neda?' The simple answer of the Mother was, 'I am in the world, and have to taste the fruit of this tree. That is why I cry.'

This world, which is a creation of God, has a way of its own that all embodied beings have to follow. The Master declared, 'When God incarnates Himself as a man, He has to behave just like any other human being. That's why it is difficult to recognize Him. He has all these, — hunger, thirst, disease, sorrow, and oftentimes fear — just as men have.' He further said, 'Caught in the trap of the five elements, Brahman moans.' (*Kathamrita*, IV. 56, III. 192)

This dual aspect of divinity and humanity was expressed through many talks of the Mother. At the 'Udbodhan' she said one day (September 1918), 'People call me Goddess, and I too think, "That may be really so. Or else how could there be all the strange things that have happened in my life?" Yogen, Golap, and others know much of this. If I should but think, "Let this happen", or "I shall eat this", the Lord somehow fulfils all these.' On another occasion (August 1919) the Mother was at Jayrambati with Radhu. One day she sat after evening to hear the letters being read out to her by a Brahmachari. In one of these, a woman devotee had praised her variously. Hearing this, the Mother said, 'Look here, sometimes it sets me thinking that since I am merely a daughter of Ram Mukherji and there are many other girls of my age at Jayrambati, how do I differ from them? Devotees

come to pay their respects from places unknown to anybody here. Besides, on questioning them I learn that some are magistrates and some are lawyers. Why do these come at all?' She simply drew attention to the problem, but suggested no solution. The Brahmachari, however, had no difficulty in diving deeper and discovering the truth. Hence he pushed the line of thought a step further and inquired, 'Well, don't you always remember your real stature?' The Mother replied, 'Can that always be so? How then could all these works be done? But even in the midst of work, whenever the desire arises, I can get the inspiration with a little thought and then the play of the Great Maya stands revealed.'

We turn back to an earlier time, February 1, 1907, when the Mother was at Jayrambati and a devotee wanted to know if the Master was the ever-present Brahman in Its fullness. As the Mother confirmed the view, the devotee put in again, 'As to that, all husbands are to their wives the ever-present Brahman in Its fullness.¹ I don't ask from that point of view.' The Mother replied, 'Yes, he is the ever-present Brahman in Its fullness — as a husband as also in that other sense.' The devotee then fell to thinking that just like the unity of Sita and Rama or of Radha and Krishna, there must be a unity between the Mother and the Master; and yet as a matter of fact he saw before his very eyes the Mother engaged in domestic duties. To remove his doubt he asked, 'Then why do I see you as though making *chapati* like any ordinary woman? What are all these? Are these *maya*?' The Mother replied, 'What else but *maya*? Why should I be in such a state if not because of *maya*? I should have been sitting by Narayana as his Lakshmi in Vaikuntha. It's just because the Lord likes to disport as a man.' The devotee again asked, 'Doesn't your true nature flash in your mind?' The Mother

1. According to the Hindu belief, husbands are to be looked upon as Siva or Narayana and wives as Sakti or Lakshmi. They are all divine, for they are essentially Brahman.

replied, ' Yes, it does at times and then, I think, " What's this that I am doing? What's this I am engaged in? " Again all these things (pointing in front)—houses, children, etc.,—come to the mind and I forget my essential nature.' And as she had accepted that sport or *maya* out of her free will, she said, now and again. ' It's only by accepting an illusion that I am so', or ' This is nothing but continuing in the midst of an illusion.'

The disports of an incarnation are only apparently human. In the Master's life it strikes one that though he was ever in divine moods, all his activities on the normal plane had a charm and orderliness of their own. On whatever level of existence his mind might be at a given time, it only revealed moral and intellectual perfection of an ideal order to which others might well aspire to rise. This is a special gift to mankind from Sri Ramakrishna who finished his earthly *play* only a few years ago. In studying the Mother's life also, we are forcefully reminded of this fact. Furthermore, just as in the Master's life there is no lack of ideals for the work-a-day world in spite of his constant state of spiritual ecstasy, so also in the Mother's life there is piety, renunciation, selflessness, and divine afflatus and serenity. Alongside of these are her affection, service, liberality, modesty, humility, and other soft human qualities which bring into prominence a much desired corrective to the individualistic and self-centred civilization of the modern age. In fact, even a casual pursuit of this life makes it clear that while the life divine is ever dedicated to general goodwill, the life human is busy with personal welfare.

Bearing all these facts in mind, Swami Premananda once told Swami Keshavananda and other devotees, ' You have seen with your own eyes, how the Mother, who is in reality the Great Goddess ruling over those who wield the destinies of kings and emperors, has yet elected to become a poor woman plastering the house with cow-dung, scouring utensils, winnowing rice and clearing the leavings of the

devotees after their meals. She undertakes all these tasks to teach the householders their domestic duties. What infinite endurance, limitless mercy and absolute absence of egotism are there!' And in a letter he wrote, 'Who has understood the Mother? There is not the least trace of splendour. The Master had at least the brilliance of wisdom. But what about the Mother? For her even that glow is wanting. What a great power is that! Glory to the Mother! Victory to the Mother! Glory to the powerful Mother! The poison that we cannot assimilate, we pass on to the Mother. The Mother takes every one on her lap. Infinite power, limitless pity! Glory to the Mother! Not to speak of us, we have not seen even the Master do so. With how much caution and testing would he accept a man! And here? What do we see here in the Mother? Astonishing, astonishing! She is giving shelter to all, eating everybody's food, and assimilating all. Mother, Mother, victory unto the Mother! Remember that mercy of the Mother, that infinite compassion of the Mother, in weal and woe, in success and failure, in famine and pestilence, in wars and revolutions. Glory unto the Mother! Victory unto the Mother!'

The Mother, too, spoke one day in this very strain. When a disciple said, 'What an abundance of spiritual trances and ecstasies had those who went to the Master! But nothing of that is being done by you to us', the Mother replied, 'As to that, to how many indeed did he do such things, and how selectively at that? Even so his body fell down quite early. To me he has pushed on a line of ants. If I do just as he did, how long will my body last? What a number of children I have to tend!'

The fields of application for the spiritual power being different, a certain disparity will be noted in the behaviour of the two personalities. But close scrutiny will reveal their fundamental similarity, nay identity. The renunciation and selflessness which charmed all concerned by their unrestricted expression in and through the life of Sri Ramakrishna, who spent his days in the precincts of a

holy temple in the midst of devout souls, did also enlighten the dark labyrinths of domestic duties by being reflected in a thousand ways against the background of family relationships in and through the life of the Holy Mother. Whereas the Master resorted to such petty desires as 'I shall smoke', 'I shall drink water', in order to chain down to the common plane his mind that ever tried to be lost in transcendental heights, the Mother accepted Radhu for keeping within limitations a mind that would otherwise expand and merge in the Infinity beyond. This may appear as a bondage, but on closer observation we find it as a proof of the limitless will power of the Mother. The Master gave up gold, whose touch caused him pain; the Mother touched it with her head under the belief that it was nothing but the goddess of wealth and good fortune in another form. Rejection of a thing as non-Brahman, and acceptance of it as Brahman, are both fundamentally indicative of enlightenment and non-covetousness. In the light of all such spiritual truths we proceed to a study of the Mother's life in a purely human setting; and in doing so we remind the reader, again, that in any attempt at an analytical comprehension of this character, we must not totally lose sight of her divinity and accept the purely feminine characteristics as a measure of her greatness.

The facts that we shall consider in this chapter fall under two categories: some of them are interlinked with her life, while of others she is but a witness. Her personal acts, sometimes interpreted by herself, are very valuable indeed but the opinions she expressed from a distance are no less so, since any evaluation made by an extraordinarily gifted, cultured, and saintly lady, steeped in the age-old tradition of her race, has its own special appeal. And when we remember that her whole life was meant as a beacon to future generations, these illustrations, through life or comments by word of mouth become all the more significant.

For the little hamlet of Jayrambati, the Mother had a lifelong fondness. Once when she was on the point of leaving for Calcutta, her aunt said, 'Sarada, do come again.' The Mother said, 'It goes without saying that I will.' And to emphasize that promise she touched the floor of the house again and again and laid its dust on her head quoting a line from a Sanskrit verse: 'Mother and mother-country are superior even to heaven.'

She had some sort of relationship established with every villager, aged or young, whatever their social standing. Even people of other villages had a share in that love. On the day of the immersion of the image of Durga, when all came to prostrate themselves before her and to receive her blessing, she never forgot to inquire about and show the utmost consideration for her 'uncle' Kunja who belonged to a lower caste of a different village and was noted for his skill in making images of deities. In such social contacts she did not let her high caste stand in her way.

The great devotee, Girishchandra Ghosh, once declared that 'in the present age Sri Ramakrishna conquered all through his weapon of salutation (humility)'. The Mother's life too was eloquent of this attitude of being lowlier than the lowliest. When as a result of advancing years it became impossible for her to cook for all, an old brahmin woman was engaged in the kitchen. The Mother called her 'aunt'. When the Mother was about to salute this aunt on the evening of the immersion of the Durga image, the old woman protested saying, 'That's unthinkable, Mother! You're the Mother of the Universe; all salute you. I am an ordinary woman; I can't possibly pocket such high honour.' The Mother, however, could not be dissuaded; she saluted the cook and added, 'That can never be; you're my aunt, to be sure.'

There was not the slightest affectation in these dealings. Once Suryanarayana, a cousin of hers, found on reaching Vishnupur from Calcutta with her that he had

left back an article without which he could not go home. Accordingly, a telegram was sent to Calcutta advising its despatch by the next train. Till the thing came, the Mother refused to go away leaving behind her cousin alone, and said, 'Is Surya a stranger to me?'

We have mentioned earlier a number of facts concerning the Mother's attitude to caste. The Master once declared, 'Devotees have no caste.' The Mother seemed to follow this literally in the field of spirituality, though in social dealings she never advocated revolution, but rather conformed to the established norms. In refusing initiation to a certain candidate who had his own family guru, she said, 'One should follow one's family tradition; one has to observe caste so long as one is in society.' When during her last illness it was proposed to feed her with bread, she declined saying, 'My boy, don't you feed me with things touched by Mohammedans during these closing days.' Accordingly, she was given bread made by brahmins. Later on she agreed to eat milkroll loaves on being told that these had been prepared by machines. At this time she developed a distaste for food, so that she had to be allowed a little quantity of rice for which alone she had some appetite. One day Dr. Kanjilal happened to be present at the meal-time. Noticing that the quantity of rice was in excess of what he could allow, he took Sarala Devi, the attendant, to task and said that from the next day he would arrange for paid nurses as Sarala could not be relied on. When the doctor left, the Mother said, 'Forsooth, I shall accept the service of those women in shoes! Does he imagine I shall? I won't be able to do so. Please go on doing the work just as you have been doing.' Actually, the professional nurses never came.

If we are to reconcile the apparent contradiction between her conformity with caste restrictions and her loving relationship with Amzad and others, we have to scrutinize a few more incidents. The Mother had no

hesitation in showing honour to non-brahmins, who were otherwise cultured, highly placed, and respectable in every way. When Kaviraj Shyamadas Vachaspati came to the 'Udbodhan' to examine Radhu (September 1918) the latter saluted the Kaviraj at the Mother's bidding. After the physician had left, some one present there asked, 'Is he a brahmin?' 'No,' replied the Mother, 'he is a Vaidya.' Again it was asked, 'Why then did you ask her to salute him?' The Mother posed the counter question, 'Why should she not?' and then explained, 'How very erudite! They are as good as brahmins. If she's not to salute him, whom should she?' A devotee of the Kayastha caste went to Jayrambati with four others. The Mother's new house was then under construction. She called Radhu and pointing to the Kayastha devotee said, 'Radhu, your elder brother has come; salute him.' The devotee then thought, 'What's this? I am a Kayastha, to be sure.' At the same time this assurance also came to his mind, 'The Mother won't certainly do anything harmful to me.' At last Radhu and the devotee both saluted each other. A devout woman came to the 'Udbodhan' to tell the Mother that she had been initiated in a dream. The Mother confirmed the *mantra* that the devotee had received. And then coming to know that she was the wife of a disciple of the Mother, the latter said, 'Why did you not tell me earlier. O Radhu, O Maku, come to salute the Manager's wife.' Dumbfounded, the devotee objected, 'Mother, what's this that you say? I am a Kayastha by birth, and how can they, who are brahmins, salute me?' The Mother said, 'One shouldn't speak thus. You're a pious soul; devotees have no caste. They stand to gain by saluting you.' When Radhu and Maku came, the devotees grasped their feet, and the Mother said, 'No need of that; she won't allow you to salute. Of a truth, they are devotees, and as such they see the Master in all beings.' On such a high pedestal she wanted to place all human relationships; but weak humanity could hardly have that divine outlook,

and hence adapted its dealings to social requirements even while in the house of God.

During the Christmas holidays of 1912, the Mother was at Banaras, and with her there was Bhanu-pisi of Jayrambati. When Golap-ma heard that two brahmin girls had touched the feet of Bhanu-pisi, she flew into a rage, because honouring a woman of the milkman caste (to which Bhanu-pisi belonged) in that fashion, was, according to Golap-Ma, tantamount to pampering the egotism of all low-caste people, as a result of which they would care little for others. When the Mother came to know of the whole incident she said to the girls, 'Look at Golap's thoughtlessness. When all should be happy on a festive occasion, here she is hurting other's feelings. Don't you mind this, my good girls. All can be saluted as devotees.'

As a solution for the mania for purity, the Mother took help of this same inward vision. Her niece, Nalini, came one day (July 1913) with a wet cloth and explained that she had to bathe since a crow had urinated on her cloth. To this the Mother said, 'I have grown old; I never heard of such a thing as urination by a crow! The mind doesn't become impure unless one has committed many sins, heinous crimes! Mania for purity! The mind baffles all attempt at purification!...As for this mania for purity, one can go on intensifying it without limit; in fact, all things go on multiplying in proportion as you allow them to do so.' On another occasion (July 1912) she said to Nalini Devi. 'In the village, I oftentimes tread on dry faeces. Then I utter (the Lord's name) "Govinda" twice, and at once everything becomes pure. All is in the mind—purity, as also impurity, is in the mind.'

There was no end to such problems that she had to face. In a changing society there are always unchanging customs of long standing which make life intolerable at every turn; and only progressive minds that are firmly rooted in spirituality and yet have a sympathetic vision stretched forward can show the way at such crises. The

Mother used to say, 'One should follow local customs.' But when she said so, she did not connive at brutally suppressing all human aspirations in the name of customs. In certain parts of Bengal, widows observe very stringent rules about food, dress, and other things. Coming to learn of such rigour in the life of a widow, the mother said, 'You should eat *chapati*, *parata* (*chapati* baked in butter), etc., at night. Take these after dedicating them to the Master.' In other words, if it was not allowable, according to local customs to eat rice, there should be found some other reasonable method for the sustenance of the body.

In this respect the natural sympathy and discriminating wisdom of the Mother must have been reinforced by what she saw the Master do one day. That was an *Ekadasi* day, the eleventh day of the moon, when widows of high castes refrain from cooked food in general. Yogin-Ma came with her old aunt to Dakshineswar. The aunt had been fasting that day without taking even water; and on the previous day also she went without food owing to some ceremony in the house. She was very old, and the fasting for two consecutive days made her extremely weak. Arrived at Dakshineswar, as they advanced towards the Nahabat, the Mother noticed the old aunt panting. So she came out to help her, and said, 'Shall I give you a little syrup?' The old lady shook her head in disapprobation. When she had recovered a little, Yogin-Ma led her to the Master's room followed by the Mother. As the old lady climbed the steps of the Master's room, he found to his great concern that she almost crawled. He hurried to the place, and taking hold of her, he asked Yogin-Ma, 'Why is she gasping for breath thus?' Yogin-Ma told the reason, whereupon the Master looked at the Mother and said, 'Could you not give her a little syrup to drink?' The Mother replied, 'I suggested it, but she declined.' The Master at once took down some sugar from a sling and mixing it in a tumbler of Ganges water held it before the

old lady saying, 'Drink.' She stared at him meaningfully for a while, then drank it without further ado. Then touching her bosom she said, 'My heart is cooled, father!' In later days, when Kshirodebala Roy, a widow from childhood, went to the Mother for initiation, she asked her, 'Dear girl, what do you eat on an *Ekadasi* day?' Kshirodebala used to eat sago at first; and then being told that it was adulterated with things that are banned for widows, she went without any food on those days. Such austerity told upon her health, and she looked emaciated. The Mother was moved on hearing her account, and she said, 'No, no, I tell you, you eat sago; this will help to tone up the system.' Later she added, 'My girl, you have practised enough of rigour; now I tell you, don't do so any more. Your body is now lean like a log of wood. If the body is destroyed with what will you undertake spiritual discipline, my dear?' Kshirodebala had her hair cropped short according to local custom. Golap-Ma and Yogin-Ma, out of their sympathy for her, argued against such unreasonableness. But the Mother intervened to say, 'It is good that she has done so. If one has hair, there creeps in a sense of luxury, one has to take care of it. However that may be my daughter, you have crossed over that bridge of hair and reached here. You have reached the goal for which all that austerity was needed. Now, I tell you, don't you undertake any more austerity.' What a fine combination we get here of pity with divine outlook, and of avoidance of luxury with eagerness for the protection of the body as an instrument for spiritual endeavour! The succeeding illustrations also are replete with the same spirit.

A devout brahmin widow of Chandrakona, who was a disciple of the Mother lived with her at one time at Jayrambati. Like the widows of old she wore a white piece of cloth without any border, cropped her hair short, and did not even chew betel, leave alone wearing ornaments; and yet she served the Mother silently and cheerfully. For this service, self-control, and avoidance of

luxury the Mother loved her and waxed eloquent in her praise.

Finding the child-widow Shavasana Devi intent on rigorous fasting, the Mother said to her, 'What will you gain by hurting the body? I tell you, drink water at least.' When Surabala Devi after her widowhood proposed to eat nothing for the rest of her life but simple boiled rice and butter, the Mother said, 'If the soul hankers after any food, that should be offered to it. Else you incur a sin. The soul cries out saying, "She has deprived me of food."'

Although the Mother did not eat rice on *Ekadasi* days, she took a few *luchies*. She was heard to say, 'Call on God when the body is calmed after eating.' Her companions, Yogin-Ma and Golap-Ma, also did not fast without food and water on those days. We noted earlier that under a belief that the Master could not die, the Mother did not discard fully the signs of her married life even after the passing away of her consort. Still her natural simplicity in food and dress, along with her reverence for tradition brought about an austerity that could not escape notice. Fish and meat she never tasted, bodice or jacket or any such thing she never put on, and instead of a cloth with broad and fabricated borders, she wore one with a very thin red outline.

The Mother's denunciation of child-marriage was unequivocal. There were two unmarried girls from Madras in the Nivedita School, who were of about twenty or twenty-one years of age. Referring to them the Mother said, 'Ah! How they have learnt arts and crafts. And as for our girls! The people of these wretched parts go on clamouring when a girl is hardly eight years old, "Send her to a new family! Have her married!" Alas! If Radhu had not been married, she wouldn't have come to grief so early.'

Uncle Kali married his sons Bhudev and Radharaman very early. Bhudev was tied in wedlock at the age of thirteen (May 7, 1913) and Radharaman at the age of

eleven. The Mother was then in Calcutta. When she got the intimation there, she remarked very caustically, 'He's marrying his little sons, and extracting money from me. He doesn't know that ultimately he will have to suffer.'

Knowing that in wedded lives there was a pitiable lack of self-control, she deplored that some people seemed to take the multiplication of their families as the be-all and end-all of life. In this connection she added, 'The Master suggested a controlled life after the birth of one or two children. Sense-control is a necessity. All those austerities enjoined for the widows are meant for sense-control.'

As she warned men against being lured by women, so also she cautioned women against men. To a woman she said, 'Never have any faith in men, not even if God Himself should come to you in the form of a man.' This was, of course, an extreme case. The woman concerned was beautiful and had become the owner of vast properties after her widowhood in the prime of life. On another occasion the Mother thus advised a woman devotee not to frequent monasteries or other places where holy men reside: 'Look here, my daughter! It's true that you will be going there with pious motives and devotion; but if that should affect their minds, you, too, will have to bear a part of the burden of the sin.' This, too, was an unusual case. But the trend of both the instructions is obvious.

The Mother had no literary education. But that did not curb her enthusiasm for making others learned. She educated her nieces Maku and Radhu in a general way, made them read out religious books for her, and had her letters written by them. Radhu was at a Christian school. As she was a grown-up girl according to contemporary opinion, Golap-Ma said that her attendance at school should be terminated. At this remark Radhu began to weep. But the Mother said, 'She's not quite grown up. Let her go to school. She can do immense good to others if she gets education and learns some useful arts from the

school. She has been married in a backward village. Through education she will not only improve herself, but will be able to help others.'

With the Nivedita School she had a sweet relation, and she was full of praise for the administrative capacity of Sister Nivedita. Sudhira Devi, who succeeded the Sister and dedicated her life for the bringing up of the girls in accordance with the ideals of her predecessor, earned the sincerest encomium of the Mother. Being told by a certain devotee that she was greatly worried because she had five unmarried daughters at home, the Mother advised her, 'If you can't marry them, why should you worry so much? Put them in the Nivedita School where they will learn and live well.' The woman did not act up to this advice; but the Mother's advice has its own intrinsic value.

She knew darning, embroidery, etc., and did not generally depend on others for such sundry things. She was full of appreciation when anyone brought her woollen fabrics, with patterns of temples and deities, for being hung up on her walls, or carpets, with creepers, trees, and flowers finely embroidered on them, for her to sit on. In fact, her admiration for the good qualities in others was very remarkable. Whatever appealed to her, she showed to others to heighten the estimation of the artist.

Speaking of the education of women she said one day at Koalpara that she had the greatest desire to see the girls of the village educated; but that the difficulty was about securing the right type of women as teachers. The few that were available were fashionable; and it is a human weakness to imbibe more easily the outward spruceness than the prudence of a teacher. Such a contingency would be more harmful than beneficial to a village.

She hated luxury. A woman whose husband was seriously ill, came to seek the Mother's benediction, dressed in her best trappings. The Mother asked her to bow down at a distance and dismissed her with a few sweet words. When the woman had left, the Mother remarked,

‘There’s such a calamity ahead of her, and she came to the Master. Whereas she should have made vows to him with sobs and tears, you noticed, how she came with perfumes and fripperies instead? Should one come to the shrine of any deity in this manner? Everything in these days looks so odd!’

In all her talks and deeds a godliness based on perfect self-discipline was what caught the eye of the most casual observer. Her life expressed itself through the rites, manners, and customs of her environment; but the touch of spirituality was unmistakable all through. After bathing in the Ganges, for instance, the Mother offered the priest there a mango, a plantain, and a pice and said, ‘I give the fruits to be sure, but the fruit of the gift is yours.’

Naturally, she set her face against social non-conformity. Yet instances are not rare of her overlooking customs when a more basic need demanded it. One day, as she was given a mango and some milk and sweets, she mixed them together, and then tasting a little of it said, ‘I leave it (as *prasada*) for my son’, and went out for washing her hands and mouth. On her return, she found a woman devotee eating the whole stuff and saying in a tone of wounded love, ‘Her sons will eat everything, while we shall starve!’ The Mother was taken aback at first, but without any protest, she ordered some rice, soup of lentils, and vegetable curry, mixed all these together, tasted a little of it, and said, ‘I leave it (as *prasada*) for my son.’ Another woman who stood by had then the doubt in her mind, ‘How could she, a brahmin woman as she is, eat twice?’ As the objection was not voiced in words, the Mother’s reply remained unknown. But in a similar case, another woman devotee could not help saying, ‘Well, Mother, how is it that, though you are a brahmin’s daughter, you have eaten rice twice and you have polluted your lips?’ The Mother replied, ‘I can do everything for the good of my children. No guilt is incurred thereby. And if it is *prasada* there’s no fault in taking it even five times;

for *prasada* is not to be classed as ordinary food. Don't you disturb your mind with such petty questions; these things make you forget the Master. In the name of the Master, do whatever you think right, notwithstanding what others may say.'

Still we repeat that, though such events were not infrequent, every act of hers in the social sphere was above criticism. Once, at Kamarpukur, a disciple wanted to take the impression of her feet on a piece of cloth. But as widows are debarred from painting their feet with scarlet dye, the Mother dissuaded him saying, 'This is not the proper place. All people don't look upon me in the same way as you do. For instance, many from the Laha family frequent this place; in consequence I shall have to hide myself, for there will be the colour of lac-dye under the feet.' During her stay at the 'Udbodhan' a woman devotee happened to bring for her a cloth with a broad red border. The Mother accepted it with a smile and wore it, but soon put it away saying, 'How can I possibly wear it, my dear? People will say, "The wife of the Paramahansa (Ramakrishna) wears a red-bordered cloth."' Anyway, since you have brought it, I shall wear it when going to the Ganges for bath.' During her last illness, a monk came to see her at the 'Udbodhan'. The Mother was in her bed, and her head had no veil. The monk massaged her feet a little and went away. The Mother then turned to the woman attendant and said, 'I had no veil on my head; why did you not draw it down? Am I dead that you are behaving so even now?'

When the Mother was going to the Ganges for her bath, Golap-Ma advised her to apply oil to her body; but she said, 'I won't rub oil. If I do, others also will; it's not proper to go for a dip in the Ganges with the oil on.' When one day the Mother tied an amulet to Radhu's body and set apart a pice in the name of a deity, so that Radhu might recover from her sickness, a woman disciple was perplexed to see her behave thus, since the Mother could by her mere will cure Radhu without having recourse to such

means or intermediaries. The Mother explained to her, 'If any one falls ill, one can get cured by vowing things to deities. Besides, each should have his due.'

At that time (August 1911) the Mother bathed at the Raja's ghat, for Durgacharan Mukherji's ghat had not then come into existence. When returning from the Ganges, she carried some water in a small pot, a little of which she poured at the roots of the wayside banyan trees and saluted them. Once, when a devotee wanted to take her to Ranchi, she declined saying that one should not go anywhere in Chaitra (March-April). When a certain Kaviraj suggested to her, as a remedy for rheumatism, to take a piece of garlic boiled in milk, she said, 'No, my son, I shall not be able to eat garlic.' The Kaviraj argued, 'Mother, the garlic will have no smell when boiled in milk. This is an efficacious remedy for rheumatism.' The Mother still said, 'No, my son, I can't do that.' So the proposal had to be dropped.

Then we come to the Mother's social outlook and patriotism. The very topic may seem queer in this context. But people who live in society, who are nurtured by the food and air of a country, imbibe certain ideas consciously or unconsciously about society and country, which continue throughout life; and though they remain generally unnoticed, still they make their presence felt at crucial moments. We have had some acquaintance with this side of the Mother's character in connection with the Sindhubala incident, the agitation for boycott of foreign goods, and the relief of the poor and the distressed. We shall now briefly refer to a few more incidents.

A disciple of the Mother, who was noted for his quiet life and religious temperament, was unnecessarily harassed by the police. One day, just as he stepped out of his chapel, he was arrested and whisked away; he was not allowed time even to take a little *prasada* or to drink a glass of water. When the Mother heard of this, she said sorrowfully, 'Just see, how iniquitous the English are!'

My honest boy! He has been oppressed for no reason whatsoever, and he has not been allowed to take a little of the Master's *prasada*. Can the rule of the English last?'

During the First World War, when there was a scarcity of cloth in the country, and the Koalpara Ashrama was busy plying its spinning wheels and looms, the Mother said encouragingly, 'Bring me a spinning wheel; I shall also spin.' When Swami Jnanananda was under police vigilance and was compelled to live in Dr. Aghorenath Ghosh's house at Katihar, he came to learn that the Mother was seriously ill at Koalpara and he visited her there. Fearing that his host, the doctor, who was a government servant, might be implicated by the police for this absence of the Swami, all at Koalpara advised Jnanananda to leave soon; but the Mother was unwilling to part from him so soon. At last she was prevailed upon to let him go; but at the same time she prayed for the eradication of that oppressive system. In 1913, when many people lost their all in the Damodar flood, the Mother, told one of her disciples, 'My boy, do good to the world.' At the Mother's behest the disciple girded up his loins for the service of the God in the form of suffering humanity and went to the Mother to take leave of her. On entering the room he was astounded to hear her saying to herself, 'Only money, money, money!', for he thought that the Mother had read his thoughts, which then centred round the problem of collecting funds for the service of the afflicted. The Mother perhaps understood the disciple's perplexity and explained, 'No, my son, money also is a necessity. Look at Kali, for instance; he only talks of money.' The Mother encouraged the members of the Ramakrishna Math to engage in social service. One day in 1916, she was resting at the house of Sri Sureshwar Sen at Vishnupur on her way to Calcutta when on that very day Brahmachari Varada arrived there to purchase rice for distribution among the famine-stricken people near about Jayrambati. His plan was to carry the rice in bullock-

carts which had brought the Mother and her party to Vishnupur. Now, finding the Brahmachari there, Radhu wanted him to accompany the party to Calcutta; but the Mother silenced her saying, 'So many people will have food only after he carries the rice from here; so many lives depend on him — have you any idea of that?' So Radhu was overruled, and Varada returned to Jayrambati.

The Mother was always busy, and liked to see others equally so. One evening Brahmachari Gopesh saw the Mother kneading some wheat flour on the verandah of Nalini Devi's house. At that time there was no lack of hands to give her relief from such jobs in her old age. And so the Brahmachari found no sense in the Mother's busying herself in this way. Accordingly, he asked her for the reason, whereupon she said, 'My son, it's good to be diligent.' And then she added solemnly after a little pause, 'Bless me so that I may work as long as I live.'

She kept herself constantly busy. At Jayrambati she tirelessly went through her daily routine. Looking to the comforts of the devotees, dressing vegetables in the morning for about two hours, taking out stores for the kitchen, arranging for the worship and then worshipping with her own hands, distributing the *prasada*, making at least a hundred betel rolls, kneading flour and preparing *chapati* and *luchi*, boiling milk, cleaning lamps, and such other works followed one another without intermission and without anybody else's help, as if they were duty alone. She used to say, 'On the one hand, the body is becoming weaker, and on the other, work is increasing.' During the rainy season one day the inmates of the 'Udbodhan' spread their wet clothes in the sun and then went about their own works or rested in their rooms below, when suddenly it began to rain and the Mother came out to take the clothes away. In spite of her rheumatism, she had to stand pretty long on the wet verandah, taking the clothes one by one, rinsing them and spreading them carefully to dry in a room. When somebody protested and reminded

her of her rheumatism, she simply said, 'Presently I shall stop, my boy; just a little remains to be done.'

Comin to know that certain monks were going out for austerity, Swami Parameshwarananda told the Mother, 'It doesn't seem good to continue in the midst of these works. Kindly permit me also to go out for austerity.' The Mother replied, 'How strangely you speak, my boy! You are doing my work, the Master's work. Is this anything less than austerity?'

At Banaras, the Mother instructed Swami Shantananda, 'Do the Master's work and undergo spiritual discipline. When one does some work, the mind remains free from vain thoughts. When one stays alone one may be subject to various thoughts.' Of course, she permitted suitable persons to undertake austerity; but here we are dealing with incidents of a different category.

Even trifling matters had a due share of her attention, and she could not tolerate disorderliness. One day at Jayrambati, a woman happened to cast away carelessly a broom after cleaning the courtyard. Noticing this the Mother told her that even such an insignificant thing as a sweeping mop should have the consideration due to it, that the smallest work should be done with proper attention and that nothing should be neglected as of no consequence.

She detested waste and extravagance. One day a servant brought some custard apples from Balaram Babu's house in a cheap wicker basket and having deposited the fruits in the shrine-room asked the monks below as to what he should do with the basket. Somebody said, 'What purpose will it serve? Throw it out on the road.' The Mother heard this from above and going to the verandah overhanging the road, she found it to be serviceable. She, therefore, condemned this wastefulness, and had the basket brought and washed for some future use.

Rammay used to go to Jayrambati from Badanganj every Saturday. Hence if any good food came to the Mother's house, she kept apart a share of it for him. One

day somebody prepared some delicious *kichudi* with plenty of ghee and other costly ingredients. When Rammay came, she gave him a great quantity of it. As he could not do full justice to it, he ate as much as he could and then wanted to throw away the rest. But the Mother said, 'My boy, don't throw away such good stuff', and directed him to call in a girl of the Sadagopa caste from a neighbouring house, who came and carried away the remaining food with great delight. Then the Mother said, 'Each should have his due. What men can eat shouldn't be wasted on cattle; what cattle can eat shouldn't be thrown away to dogs; what cattle and dogs can't eat can be thrown into ponds for the fish — nothing should be wasted.' As for herself, she kept even such useless stuff as waste vegetables and fruit peels for cattle.

Prone to follow tradition as human society is, there crop up strange problems for it which refuse to be fitted into any existing pattern, and hence society reacts either by ignoring or by suppressing them. But on the transparent hearts of supermen is reflected even under such circumstances a new light by which society is able to discover fresh avenues of approach to such baffling situations. In front of the Mother's house in Calcutta, there lived a man with his paramour. When the woman fell ill, the man tended her with the fullest care, and the Mother once said in praise of this man, 'How splendidly he attends on her, my dear! I never saw the like of it. This is real service, this is real love.' The person spoken to kept silent before the Mother, though she entertained the greatest repugnance for the pair and thought, 'Fancy, that there can be any such thing as service for a paramour!' It is naturally difficult for ordinary women to appreciate readily this catholicity of the Mother.

Up till now we have noticed the Mother in the midst of serene and solemn surroundings. But we should not conclude that there was no girlish simplicity or feminine joviality in her. In fact, her homeliness and conviviality

screened off her greatness so often that those who came in contact with her, thought of her more as a near and dear one than as one who was superhuman. Where others would resort to blustering for concealing their ignorance or ineptitude, the Mother readily admitted her shortcoming or inability to the extent of making herself the laughing-stock of all and joining heartily in the resulting hilarity.

During an early visit to Calcutta she found on entering a bath-room and opening a tap that a hissing sound issued out of the water pipe. This scared her away and she told others that some snake had entered into the pipe. At this, her hearers burst out laughing, for it is a common experience to the Calcutta people that when the water supply is cut off for some time, air enters into the pipes, and when the supply is resumed, the air pressed out by the water produces a hissing sound. Nothing abashed by that laugh at her expense, the Mother used to recount the incident to her disciples in later days and make fun of her own rural simplicity.

The hurricane lantern that the Mother had at Jayram-bati was of an old pattern with some wire loops around to protect the chimney. As the Mother used the lantern carefully, the chimney had a long life. But to take it out of the encircling wires was difficult for her and she said innocently, 'There's too much of complicated mechanism; I can't take it out.' In order to praise the intelligence of a Calcutta girl she said, 'The daughter-in-law of such a family can wind a timepiece!', as though that was a very dexterous job. Mathematics perplexed the Master, and machinery puzzled the Mother. This peculiar attitude to science and its achievements of these twin souls, who incarnated to lead the modern world out of its psychological chaos, is worth serious notice.

Let us now look at her knowledge of conjugal relationship. One day her niece Radhu complained to her that her husband Manmatha had given her a slap. When the Mother inquired about the cause, Radhu said that she

had thrown a towel at Manmatha. At this, the Mother seemed to side with Radhu and find fault with Manmatha's conduct. But a woman devotee present there argued that if Radhu had flung the towel at her husband, it was nothing unnatural for him to retaliate with a slap. That changed the Mother's mood, who said, 'Is that really so, my daughter-in-law? Do you have such altercations? I had no such problem with the Master, and hence I have no experience.' And to Radhu she said, 'Listen! Now then, it is you who are to blame — that's what the daughter-in-law here says.'

Often enough she deliberately played the little girl with others. Though she had many attendants, she importuned a boy saying, 'Do pluck some flowers for me, my son — the fine, good boy that you are!' The boy refused again and again; and yet the Mother would not give in. At last she got the flowers plucked by him. She had many women disciples near at hand to attend to her personal needs, but she told an old village woman, 'My daughter, do massage my feet a little; there's a gnawing pain there.' The old woman would not agree under the plea that she had been working the whole day, and that there could be no question of massaging at that late hour in the night when her fatigued body wanted rest. The Mother still persisted, 'Do rub it with your hand a little; tell me, what else you can do now, my good girl!' The woman had to yield at last.

Rammay, then a young boy reading at Badanganj, came to the Mother's house on Saturdays, and went back on Mondays, spending two days there in doing all kinds of petty works for the Mother. The Mother initiated him and loved him very much. One day there were many devotees present at the house. The Mother and Rammay sat near the hearth preparing *chapatis* on small wood pieces with rolling-pins, while Nalini Devi baked them. Rammay could roll three pieces at a time and turn them round with the rolling-pin itself. The work progressed thus when Nalini

suddenly remarked, 'Aunt, Rammay's *chapatis* are getting better inflated than yours.' Like a petulant girl the Mother at once pushed off the rolling pin and the flat wood piece and said, 'Then I won't roll any more; let him do it all. I have grown old in the work, and he is just a suckling, from whose throat milk spurts out if one but presses it. Fancy, that he can roll better than I do!' Rammay also pushed off his rolling pieces and said, 'Mother, I won't roll unless you also do so.' And to Nalini he said, 'How could you know which is mine and which Mother's?,' The Mother then resumed her work.

There was no lack of fun either. One day Nivedita and Christine came to her. The former had mastered a few Bengali words with the help of which she said, 'Mother divine, you are our Kali.' Christine also repeated the same idea in English. Hearing them, the Mother said with a simper, 'No, my dears, I can't become Kali or any such deity. In that case I shall have to keep my tongue protruded.' When her words were interpreted to Nivedita and Christine, they said, 'The Mother need not undergo that trouble at all; we look upon her as our Mother. And Sri Ramakrishna is our Siva.' That being explained to the Mother, she tittered and said, 'That much can somehow be seen to.'

The Mother had fever at Jayrambati, and, therefore, while drinking sago she told the disciples, 'How is it, my dears, you seem to have no attraction for the *prasada* today.' On another day, as she sat inside uncle Prasanna's house with her legs hanging down, Prakash Maharaj went in and after prostrating himself said, 'Mother, don't make me ramble about any more.' The Mother replied, 'You could forget me and wander about so long, and should I not now make you wander a little more?'

The Mother might make fun; but when others ridiculed anybody for his foolishness, she did not unnecessarily add to his embarrassment by joining in the giggle; but rather she would show sympathy. During her last stay

at Jayrambati, some devotees from Ranchi came with many fruits for her. There sat by her a widow named Bhavini Devi who was distantly related to her as a cousin, and as such she was known to the devotees as aunt Bhavini. The aunt's old mother was then ill and hence the Mother had given the aunt earlier two pomegranates for her mother. Later came the fruits from Ranchi, out of which the aunt expected a good share. And so she said with a deep sigh, 'Alas! At first it was I who was proposed to be married to Paramahansa Deva (Ramakrishna). My father did not wed me then to him thinking that he was mad. If the wedding had taken place, all these things would have entered my house.' This made all laugh. There was a smile on the Mother's lips but it did not denote ridicule but rather friendship. She said to the aunt, 'Why, then, take whatever you want.' And to her attendant she said, 'O Hari, put aside something for the Master and then give some more papaws, pomegranates and other fruits to Bhavini.' To the aunt she said, 'Don't you give the papaws to your mother to eat; they are rather bad for her.'

Her ideas of money and ornaments differed somewhat from the Master's. As soon as these came to her hands she touched them to her head. If anybody happened to remind her of the Master's very different treatment of them she used to reply without any subterfuge or prevarication, and yet in words full of meaning, 'To compare me to the Master! My son, I am after all a woman! The Master himself went so far as to make me wear golden ornaments.' She had some regard for precious metals as symbols of the goddess of good luck. But she had no attachment for them. Once, before starting for Jayrambati from Calcutta, the Mother gave her attendant a ten rupee note for purchasing a wrapper for a poor woman in the village. The cloth cost two and a half rupees, so that the attendant wanted to return to the Mother the balance of seven and a half rupees. But she refused saying that she had given only a

five-rupee note. The attendant then wanted to ascertain how many five-rupee and how many ten-rupee notes she had in her box. The Mother did not remember. Then he asked, 'Do you at least remember how much money you had in all?' 'No,' replied the Mother. At last the attendant said, 'Now you can well realize the truth. Why should I be returning more? And where can I get the extra amount?' Only when the matter was thus pushed home to her, did she agree to accept the money.

This non-attachment was an inborn virtue. The Master then lived at Dakshineswar. Desiring that some provision for the maintenance of the Mother should be made, he arranged for a sum of two hundred rupees to be paid to the Mother. She tied it up in a piece of cloth and put it by in an earthen vessel meant for storing spices. The Master, coming to know of this, asked her, 'Is it wise to keep money thus?' Referring to this incident the Mother said smilingly to a disciple, 'And now, by his will, what a lot of money is flowing in and out!' In fact, the Mother was wholly a disinterested witness of the inflow and outflow of money. In the beginning she did not even touch the money offered by the devotees at her feet; Golap-Ma and others who happened to be near at hand looked after all that. Subsequently when for the good of this world, her mind was tied by divine ordinance to this plane through Radhu, and her household became larger, she was forced to take more active interest in the day-to-day management. Even during the first years of this new situation her brothers received all the money that came by postal money orders and she only fixed her thumb impression on the receipts when the occasion demanded it. Still later, one of her attendants wrote the Mother's name, while she put the thumb impression. She then picked up the amount as a whole without counting or examining the genuineness of the coins and deposited the sum in a box. She did not like giving too much of attention to money, saying as she did, 'The jingling of coins lures the minds

of poor people.' The money was kept in an ordinary box and drawn out of it without any account for receipt or disbursement. She used to hand over the key to her attendant and ask him to take out the necessary sum; or she herself opened it and said, 'Here it is, take it.' When any balance was returned after shopping, she kept it in the box without counting. Sometimes she herself purchased some vegetables from the mother of Satish Samui who came to her door with them. After the purchase, she took out a handful of coins and held them before the woman, so that she might count out her due. Sometimes there was an over-payment which the woman discovered after reaching home, and came back to return.

But this should not be construed to mean that the Mother was either a spendthrift or that she lacked worldly wisdom. Perfect indifference to mundane affairs might be ingrained in her; but she who had accepted the responsible duty of leading others in all walks of life could not afford to be wholly oblivious of worldly trends. Besides, after the construction of a separate home for herself at Jayrambati, she, as the sole mistress, had to pay more attention to everything concerning it.

The village committee fixed a tax of four rupees per annum on the new house. The tax for the first year was paid without her knowledge when she was in Calcutta. When the village watchman came to collect the tax for the second year, she instructed the attendant not to pay, but to try to get an exemption by applying to the village council. The attendant was a little surprised at this earnestness in the Mother for saving such a paltry sum, though he dared not speak out his mind. But in due course she herself explained, 'I am here now and I may be able to afford to pay the tax; but in the future there may be some monk or Brahmachari residing here, who may have to maintain himself by begging. Where will he get the money for paying the tax?' Howsoever that may be, the President of the council directed the tax to be paid for the second

year, as it was too late to grant exemption, assuring them at the same time that he would stop the levy from the third year. The gentleman kept his promise.

When Swami Jnanananda was at Jayrambati, he tried to procure pure milk even at a high cost. To the milkman he used to say, 'You can charge as high as a rupee for thirty-two pounds. But I want pure milk.' Hearing this the Mother said, 'What is this you are saying, Jnan? Here milk is available at a pice for a pound so that poor people also can drink it; and you are raising the rate thus! As for a milkman, it's his habit to mix water with the milk. If you raise the rate he will be tempted to mix more water for earning more money.' When the Swami lived at the Ashrama at Navasan, he procured one day some of his 'pure milk' at an exorbitant rate, for the Mother's house at Jayrambati. Brahmachari Gopesh went with the milk; but on the way, he found to his horror that there was a little fish in it. He then thought that as the milk could not be offered to the Master, he might as well throw it away. But on second thought he preferred to carry it to the Mother and abide by her decision. The Mother was told everything, but at the suggestion of throwing it away she said, 'Why should you waste it? If it can't be offered to the Master, there are the children who can drink it.'

One day a woman came to sell blankets at the 'Udbodhan', and Nalini Devi fell to chaffering with her. The woman demanded a rupee and four annas, whereas Nalini would not agree to more than a rupee. This went on for a pretty long time, when the Mother said to Nalini, 'You have been higgling for such a long time for a petty sum of four annas! Fie! She moves from door to door with the load on her head in the hope of earning a little money; and here you detain her so long for a trifling sum! Besides, what need have you of a blanket? You have everything and still you are out to buy one! It would have been better if one were given to my daughter-in-law (meaning her disciple Kshirodebala, who was there). She does not use anything

but blankets; of these, too, she has but one. Though she has to manage with that single blanket even in these cold days, still she doesn't beg from anyone.' Kshirodebala was moved to tears to think that the Mother kept herself so well-informed.

As vegetables were not easily available at Jayrambati, Satish Samui's mother procured them from other places and sold them to the Mother at prohibitive rates. When the Mother's attention was drawn to this she said simply, 'She is mindful of my needs; in times of difficulty we can get our requirements from her just for the asking. She is my store-keeper.'

The Holy Mother was the mother of all; her acts and advice were for all. Hence, though she was full of the spirit of renunciation in personal life, she asked her householder disciples to earn money and accumulate it. We have already referred to Surendranath Gupta. There is also the instance of Prabodhchandra Chatterji, the headmaster of the Badanganj High School, who once came to the Mother with a good supply of fruits, sweets, and vegetables at a considerable cost. At this the Mother scolded him saying, 'Why did you spend so much money? You have your wife and children. You should lay by something for them. I am not in any want, thanks to the Master's grace.' This made Prabodhchandra sad, since he thought, 'Have I no right to serve her just because I am poor?' The Mother read his mind and said, 'What you have to consider, my boy, is that if you put by something, there will be some provision for your family and the future. Besides, you will be able to serve the holy men too. If you have nothing, what will you give to the holy men, my dear?' When he once proposed to buy a horse, the Holy Mother said, 'No, my son, don't! Buy a treadle-car (bicycle) instead.'

Now we turn to the Mother's social dealings. Srī Sajani Roy, a nephew of Sambhu Roy, a landholder of Jibta, was appointed in the charitable homoeopathic dispensary

attached to the Mother's house, as a salaried physician. At the time of his initiation he offered two rupees at the Mother's feet, who, however, refused this, though she used to gladly accept the greens and vegetables that he brought from his garden. The Mother realized that this behaviour appeared to her attendant as an enigma; and hence she explained the matter thus on that very evening, 'Mark you, I didn't keep Sajani's money. That he brings from his own garden certain things is altogether a different matter. If the people at his home come to know of our acceptance of money, they will be scared, lest I should ultimately lay my hands on their property. They are very worldly-minded people! They will naturally be suspicious.'

Brahmachari Gopesh while at Jayrambati, came to know that the devotees of Dacca had published an appeal for collecting one thousand and five hundred rupees to defray the expenses of the Mother's visit to East Bengal. Without mentioning the appeal for subscription, Gopesh casually asked her whether she was planning to go to East Bengal. The Mother replied, 'How can I say, my son? The Master knows where I shall go.' Then Gopesh informed her in a general way that the devotees of Dacca were making efforts to take her there. At this the Mother said, 'They will raise some money, to be sure!' After a pause she continued, 'They always have maggots in their brains. Look here, for instance, there's a new craze for the Master.'

When two Brahmacharis from Garbeta came to Jayrambati, the Mother gathered from them that they were going round collecting money from the big villages in the country-side. She at once cautioned them saying, 'Mind you, my boys, don't collect any money from this side in the Master's name, be it for a home of service or any other purpose. You can do as you like in a town or in far-off places.'

Sri Lalit Chatterji was present at Jayrambati during the ceremonial opening of the Mother's new house. Being enthusiastic about opening a charitable dispensary

and a free school there, he explained to the Mother, 'Mother, if an appeal is issued in your name to the devotees, the poor people will be immensely benefited.' Though the Mother disliked such a method of raising funds, she could not reject the proposal forthwith out of consideration for the gentleman's susceptibility. Just then Brahmachari Rupachaitanya (Hemendra) came there and condemned the idea with all the vehemence he could command. The Mother heaved a sigh of relief and told Brahmachari Rashbehari afterwards, 'Methinks he saved me like my Yogin (Swami Yogananda). Fie! For shame! To beg for money!' Subsequently Lalit Chatterji himself met the expenses for the dispensary.

Next we come to the Mother's courtesy. A young man of the Roy family of Jibta came to Jayrambati on some business at about two o'clock in the afternoon, and finding Rammay and others, who were of the same age and his old acquaintances, he sat in the Mother's outer house to have a chat. The Mother somehow coming to know of his presence, lighted the hearth and sat down to prepare a little *halva* with semolina. When Rammay protested 'Mother, he has not come to you; he is of our age and has come to confabulate. Why need you take so much trouble for him?' The Mother replied, 'How can that be so, my boy? They are our landlords, our rulers. We have to do something for them.'

The language used by the Mother and the method of her instruction had their own distinctiveness. When talking to the people of Calcutta, she adopted their vocabulary; but with her relative she talked in her native dialect. But the two forms of words got mixed up at times, and the rural accents were often easily discernible. Every word she spoke was soft and sweet. Instead of ordering a disciple to do this or that she would say, for instance, 'My boy, won't it be better to have it so?' But for the good of very young disciples she might often use such expressions as, 'I say, you do this.' At times she

lingered on some words in order to emphasize them. One day, as Bibhuti Babu was returning from Jayrambati it rained heavily and this made the Mother anxious for the whole day. When Bibhuti Babu next visited Jayrambati she said, 'So you went away. But it began to rain; and I thought my Bibhuti must be—crossing the river by—now.' She interjected charming proverbs into her talks, thus making them all the more impressive. Sri Akshay Kumar Sen, the composer of the *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Punthi*—in epic style, came to her one day and called her, 'Mother', to which the Mother replied, 'Yes, my son.' The poet then said, 'Mother, I called you "Mother", and you responded saying, "Yes." What more fear need I have?' The Mother corrected him saying, 'No, my boy, don't you speak thus. "He that is diffident wins in the end." ' One day the Mother was explaining to a woman devotee, that since human gifts do not last long, one should not beg from men, nay, not even from one's father or one's husband. Then she added, 'When the Master gives, it overflows all limits. The Master's gifts know no limitation. "He that begs gets nothing, and he that begs not, gets everything." ' In connection with Nivedita's death she said one day. 'He that is a great soul, for him cries the inmost soul.'

In addition to the command of such pregnant proverbs she chose and used her words with such skill, that, though they were simple, they always revealed a cultured and thoughtful mind. After the conclusion of the First World War, Jatindranath Ghosh one day tried to explain to her the fourteen clauses of peace as adumbrated by President Wilson of the U.S.A. After hearing some of these the Mother commented, 'Their protestation is only lip-deep (*mukhastha*, meaning memorized or resting on lips).' As he did not seem to have grasped the meaning, she elaborated her point thus: 'If it issued from their hearts (*antahstha*), it would mean a world of difference.'

And there were the apt analogies. In order to explain the idea that God-realization can come through His grace

alone, though spiritual discipline has its own worth inasmuch as it purifies the mind, she said, 'His grace alone avails. Yet one must practise meditation and *japa*. The impurities of the mind are removed thereby. As the fragrance of the flower comes out when it is moved about, or that of the sandal issues forth when it is rubbed, so also enlightenment dawns when one goes on thinking on God. By transcending desires, one can get it at once.' Coming to learn once of the misunderstanding between two persons, she said, 'There are times when everything has to be endured. At times (i.e., before sacrificing to gods) you have to offer flowers even at the hoofs of goats.' There were many devotees who regretted that though they had a rare guru like her, they had no enlightenment. She consoled such people thus, 'Whatever I had to give, I gave once for all at that very time (of initiation). But if you want immediate peace, you must take recourse to spiritual discipline; otherwise you will get it after death.' To explain the difference between this acquisition of grace and becoming conscious about the acquisition, she said to a devotee, 'Suppose, my son, that you are asleep on a cot, and somebody has carried you along with your cot. Will you be conscious of this fact just after awaking? Or will you realize that you have reached a new place only after fully shaking off your drowsiness?'

Extremely gentle by nature as the Mother was, she would not hurt anybody's feelings, and such was her nature that where people magnified others' faults, she took notice of the little bits of merit that there might be and waxed eloquent in recommending these to others. The devotees therefore, got nothing but blessing from her. A devotee brought some mangoes to the Mother's house in Calcutta depending on the recommendation of the dealer and without tasting them, since he thought it improper to eat from anything meant for the deities before they were actually offered to them. When they sat for meal at noon and *prasada*, including the mangoes, was served, none could

eat the fruits as they were extremely sour. None the less, the Mother tasted one of them and said, 'No, it is a good enough fruit with a mixture of sweet and sour tastes.' The Mother indeed had a bias for sour things; but that was not the only cause for her praising in this instance; the real motive was to save the devotee from embarrassment. Indeed, whenever the sweetmeats brought by the devotees proved to be bad, she tasted one or two by way of encouragement.

Whatever she had, she distributed with a free hand among the devotees. The *prasada* that was set apart for her breakfast, she used to give away to the devotees. And if she herself began distributing the *prasada*, then even the little syrup of sugar-candy that she had for her morning drink, would be exhausted or every little of it would be left over for her use.

Though she had no education in the modern sense of the term, yet her manners, and conversation were so dignified, liberal, instructive, and charming that a cultured foreign woman like Sister Nivedita once wrote about her: 'To me it has always appeared that she is Sri Ramakrishna's final word as to the ideal of Indian womanhood. But is she the last of an old order, or the beginning of a new? In her one sees realized that wisdom and sweetness to which the simplest of woman may attain. And yet, to myself the stateliness of her courtesy and her great open mind are almost as wonderful as her sainthood. I have never known her hesitate to give utterance to large and generous judgement, however new or complex might be the question put before her. Her life is one long stillness of prayer. Her whole experience is of theocratic civilization. Yet she rises to the height of every situation. Is she mortured by the perversity of any about her? The only sign is a strange quiet and intensity that comes upon her. Does one carry to her some perplexity or mortification born of social developments beyond her ken? With unerring intuition she goes straight to the heart of the matter, and

sets the questioner in the true attitude to the difficulty." (*The Master as I saw Him*, p. 147)

We shall now give a brief account of the daily routine of her life. Her habit of leaving the bed in the small hours of the night persisted throughout her life. At 3 a.m. she woke up with the names of the deities on her lips and the first thing for her to do was to have a look at the Master's picture. After attending to her personal cleanliness, she woke up the Master and then sat for *japa*. This routine she followed even in ill health, though at times when the body appeared too weak, she lay down again after washing her mouth. About early rising she said, 'Wherever I might happen to be, when it struck three at night, I felt as though somebody blew a flute near my ears.' After arranging flowers, *bel* leaves, and fruits for the Master with her own hands, she sat down for worship at about nine o'clock. This would be over in an hour. Then she distributed the *prasada* for all on *sal* leaves. During the closing years of her life, the women devotees at the 'Udbodhan' helped her, and the monks performed the worship. If any one took too much time for worship and chanting of hymns, she expressed her disapproval saying, 'After finishing the offering of food, let him chant the hymns as long as he can. What's this? People don't get their breakfast, it becomes late.' She did all her duties quickly, diligently, efficiently, and in due time, and she expected others also to do likewise.

It struck two before her lunch was finished. Then she rested awhile. But that was also the time when the women devotees freed from household duties found opportunity to visit the Mother. The Mother talked with them as she lay on her bed. She got up at about 3-30 p.m., changed her clothes and offered light refreshment to the Master. Then she sat for *japa*, and talked with the women devotees at intervals. The men came at about 5-30 p.m., when the women devotees moved away to another room. The Mother, with a wrapper all over her body and her feet dangling from the cot on which she sat, accepted the obeisance of

her sons. If any one asked her, 'How are you, Mother?' she would indicate by a motion of her head that she was well, or say so gently in a low tone which was communicated more loudly, if it were necessary, by another who stood by her. If any devotee had any special problem, he waited till the last. If he happened to be intimately known, the Mother would answer him directly, but if a new-comer, she would take another's help. Before dusk, she would again sit for *japa* which would continue till after nightfall. Then she would be down on the floor till the Master was served with his night-offerings. As she lay there, some woman disciple would step in to massage her feet with oil. She usually retired to bed at about 11 p.m. after food.

She had some speciality about her food. Among greens she liked gram leaves and radish leaves. When she lost appetite after any attack of malaria, she was given radish leaves. She liked brinjals and other vegetables fried in oil with a thin coating of pasted lentils, or boiled potatoes. On winter mornings, the Master was often offered these things along with fried-rice and fried pulses. She also had a taste for sweet balls made out of *mug* or lentils. As she suffered from dysentery, Kaviraj Durgaprasad Sen prescribed for her *amrul* leaves, which she often ate in her closing days, and which Swami Premananda sent her from the Belur Math whenever he found an opportunity. Among the different varieties of *sandesh* (dry sweetmeats from cheese) she liked *ratabi* and among cakes *rasapulis*. In the morning she drank a little of the syrup of sugar-candy. Among mangoes she preferred those which had a bit of sourness rather than those that were all sweet, as for instance, *Pearafuli*, *Langra*, and *Alfonso*. Because she was rheumatic she did not take much of curds. On medical advice she drank milk twice daily. Each time she was given a pound of milk, half of which she drank, and left the other half with rice mixed with it as *prasada* for her children who came to see her. In the afternoon she took nothing but betels and water. Her night meal consisted of

two or three *luchis*, a little vegetable, and milk. She cleaned her teeth four times a day with a powder made of tobacco and cocoanut leaves burnt together.

So long as the Mother lived with her brothers' families at Jayrambati, she used to dress vegetables, sitting on the verandah, from seven in the morning till nine. The devotees sat by her then and talked while helping her with cleaning and sorting the greens and vegetables. After bath, she sat for worship at about nine o'clock and then distributed *prasada* among the devotees. They generally got fried-rice, *halva*, and sweets, to which were often added fruits and roots brought by themselves. This over, she entered the kitchen to relieve the cook for her breakfast. In curries she used salt, chilli, and spices very sparingly, as that accorded with the Master's taste.

Whenever a devotee went inside to bow down before her, she gave him a sweetmeat with a glass of water and at least two rolls of betel. Whatever the devotees brought from Calcutta or other places for her, she accepted with readiness and subsequently distributed these among the devotees as though they were meant for themselves only. The village people, too, came to pay their respects to their 'grandmother', and in return got handfuls of the good things brought from afar. Whenever Swami Saradananda and Krishnabhavini Devi, wife of the Master's devotee Balaram Babu, sent any good thing, she set apart the first shares for Simhavahini, Dharma, and other village deities. Her relatives and disciples also got their shares. Again, if any devotee happened to be absent, she kept his share reserved for him. During a festival some cakes were prepared in the Mother's house, some of which she kept away for Bibhuti Ghosh who used to come there regularly. But for some reason, he could not turn up at the expected time; nevertheless the Mother went on placing the cakes over the fire every day to keep them fresh, and every time she did so, she said, 'May be, he'll come tomorrow; if he does, then I shall be sorry to think, "Alas, he could not

get it to eat!"' Thus when after four days Bibhuti went to the Mother's house he found his own share still intact.

In the new house at Jayrambati, the tenor of her life was almost the same; any difference that was noticeable was owing to her old age and weakness. At that time she had to cut down her activity and spend more time in bed. But even so, her habit helped her to carry on her *japa* as usual. When the sun went up in the morning she came out, drank a little medicated water and then sat for dressing vegetables, talking the while with her disciples. At about nine o'clock, she sponged her body with tepid water and worshipped the Master and the child Krishna. Then she initiated any candidate that might be there. After that she distributed the *prasada* and supervised the kitchen. Then she prepared two hundred betel rolls in the manner which the Master had taught her. On some days the mail was read out at this time, and the Mother gave orally the answer to each letter, which the attendant then put down in writing. When the cooking was over, she invited the Master to his meal in the kitchen. After that she sat down for food with the attendants. As she suffered from biliousness which produced a burning sensation all over the body, she had a liking for a soup of black lentils. Here also she mixed some rice with milk, just as at the 'Udbodhan', for the devotees to eat as *prasada*. At about three in the afternoon she washed her hands and feet and sat down for dressing vegetables, during which time the village women gathered round her and poured forth the tales of their weal and woe. There was a brahmin woman cook; still the Mother cooked a few dishes with her own hands for her children, which she herself served. If on any day the daily mail could not be dealt with in the morning, it was taken up in the evening. At 9 p.m. food was offered to the Master by the Mother herself; or if she could not, through indisposition or illness, by somebody else. She could retire only at eleven o'clock after providing for the comforts of all.

VALEDICTION

The Mother was at Jayrambati. The devotees decided to celebrate her birthday on December 13, 1919. To see the Mother on that auspicious occasion many devotees gathered there, while others sent offerings of clothes, flowers, fruits, and sweets. Owing to indisposition, she sponged her body with tepid water and wore the cloth sent by Swami Saradananda. When she had finished worshipping the Master, the devotees put vermilion and sandal-paste on her forehead and garlands round her neck. She sat there on her cot with her legs down, and the devotees came in one by one to worship her feet. It was not her custom to sit for her meal before her sons had finished theirs; but today she made an exception. At the request of all, she partook of the *prasada* after offerings had been made to the Master. Then the devotees and villagers were served with the *prasada*.

For some time the Mother had not been in good health. The strain of the birthday celebration brought about a relapse of the fever. At first all thought that it was her usual ailment which would soon yield to local treatment. But in spite of all that local physicians could do, the fever recurred intermittently and this made her extremely weak. It was noticed then that even a little temperature brought about complete prostration. Notwithstanding this, the Mother kept on initiating people during the intervals of the disease. As the devotees came from distant parts with great hopes, the Mother could not disappoint them even though such continuous strain drained away quickly her diminishing vitality.

Matters soon came to such a pass that no further reliance could be placed on local treatment and information had to be sent to Swami Saradananda, who, however, was then at Banaras in connection with some important work; and, as we have already mentioned, the Mother was loth to go the 'Udbodhan' in his absence. To add to

the difficulty of the situation, the Swami had to hurry to Bhuvaneshwar just after his return from Banaras. When he next came to Calcutta, he realized that the Mother's condition could brook no delay, and he, therefore, promptly sent Swami Atmaprakashananda with two others to Jayrambati to take the Mother to Calcutta. The Mother readily consented to accompany them, and it was settled that at ten o'clock on Tuesday, February 24, the Mother would start for Calcutta with Radhu, Radhu's mother, Maku, Nalini Devi, the widow of Navasan and Brahmachari Varada.

The Mother was then so weak that when she went to the chapel of Simhavahini two days before the day of starting, she became absolutely exhausted and said later, 'It made me perspire like one on one's death-bed.' On the day of journey, she fell down on the landing steps of the tank (Punya-pukur) behind the house. The arrangement was that the Mother and Radhu would travel by two palanquins, while others would walk up to the Amodar and get into bullock-carts on the other side of the river. But Radhu refused to get into one of the palanquins, which the Mother allotted to Maku and her child without further ado. Early in the morning of the appointed day all left for Vishnupur except the Mother and Maku. The Mother got ready to start after finishing the Master's worship. And then the villagers gathered round her and said with tearful eyes, 'Come back soon after recovery. Don't you forget us for long.' 'Everything is in the Master's keeping;' replied the Mother, 'can I really forget you?' And she wrapped the Master's photograph in a piece of cloth, put it in a box, made a last salutation, and stood up to start. Crossing the outer gate, she saluted with folded hands in the names of Simhavahini and other village deities and walked slowly westward by the houses of her brothers. She would get into the palanquin after crossing the bounds of the village, as out of respect for the village deities she did not use any vehicle within its limits. Uncle Prasanna's

wife was standing there at their door with a pot of water and a basin to wash the Mother's feet when she sat in the palanquin. The Mother said to her, 'You need not carry the water; hand over these things to Hari (Haripremamanda); he will wash my feet.' The aunt obeyed and went in to get a glass of water, some sweets, and some pasted betel, with which she proceeded towards the Aher, the irrigation tank of the village. The Mother saluted the deity Yatra-siddhi-raya at Ghoshpara and turning back saluted the village of her nativity. Then she sat in the palanquin, when Hari washed her feet and the aunt handed over the sweets, the glass of water, and betel. The Mother took all these, and gave one of her cotton wrappers to Hari, as a memento, saying, 'Hari, keep this.'

Varada moved along on a bicycle by the Mother's side, and he intended to proceed thus to Vishnupur. They went westward while the villagers looked on with wet eyes. As the river could not be forded at the usual place because of the flood there at the time, their way lay through Shihar, which meant some two or three additional miles. At Shihar the palanquin was stopped by the Mother, who then washed her hands and feet and went to bow down to Shantinatha (Siva) at His temple, where she made an offering of some sweets, sugar, and molasses. As many boys and girls had gathered there, the Mother distributed some of the *prasada* among them as also to Maku and others, tasted a little herself, and the rest she kept aside in her hem for Radhu. When they reached Koalpara it was past eleven o'clock.

As soon as they reached there, Varada was told that the money for their expenses on the way had been left by mistake at Jayrambati in the house of uncle Kali, from where he was expected to fetch it without the Mother's knowledge. After Varada's departure the Mother found a mosquito-net missing, for searching out which she wanted him. As he was nowhere to be seen, she asked him on his return as to where he had been. So he had to divulge

everything. The net, however, was not to be found. Hence the Mother said, 'All the signs appear to be inauspicious.' According to the belief in those parts, the losing of anything on the way forebodes some evil.

It had been arranged that five of the bullock-carts would leave for Vishnupur that afternoon, the two palanquins with the Mother and Maku would start next morning, and the sixth cart would follow them in the afternoon. Next day at sunrise the Mother went to the shrine-room at the Ashrama to salute the Master. Afterwards, when the attendant met her at the Jagadamba-Ashrama, she said, 'So you are here! Why are you so late? It will be hot. Take this flower as a blessing for the start.' And she picked up a flower from the feet of the Master, touched it on to her head and then giving it to him said, 'Tie it to a corner of your cloth.' When the attendant bowed down before her, she made a little *japa* on his head and chest and kissed him touching his chin. At last she took leave of all and got into the palanquin. She had in her hand a stick with which she had been walking. This she now gave to Gagan (Swami Ritananda) for handing it over to uncle Prasanna, for it belonged to him. She also gave him a mosquito-net for the uncle. And she said as she departed, 'My son, there's Sarat (Saradananda) to look after you all.' As Gagan found no occasion for such a remark in the present context, he went on musing over it with some apprehension.

The palanquin moved on. After passing Kotulpur the Mother called Varada to her side to say, 'Be always by my side, and keep your eyes open as you proceed. All the ornaments of Radhu and Maku are in the latter's palanquin.' This made Varada circumspect, and knowing as he did that the leader of the bearers was a devotee of the Mother, he called him to a solitary place to say, 'Mother is apprehensive; you will have to be cautious on the way, particularly in the forest near Vishnupur.' The leader said reassuringly, 'We are thirty-two strong with a stout staff for each under the palanquins.'

At Jaypur the Mother ordered the palanquins to be lowered. The hut in which they had cooked last time when on their way to Jayrambati, was now almost broken. The sight of it evoked a smile on the Mother's face and she said, 'Hey-day! That's our hut, my boy.' She went near it, sat on a blanket under a tree, and brought out two rupees for fried-rice for a light repast for the bearers. Then she heated the milk for Maku's son and went to the tank nearby to wash her hands and feet. Then she ordered a piece worth of fried-rice for herself and some more of the same stuff as also some fried things for Varada and Maku. When the fried-rice came, the Mother munched a little and then passing it on to others, she said, 'I can no longer chew it.' The journey was resumed after all had finished their meals.

The eight miles of the road from Jaypur to Vishnupur runs through such thick forest that one is afraid to pass through it even in the day-time. In the centre of the forest about four miles from Jaypur, there is a place called Tantipukur where a shop caters to the needs of the passers-by. When the party arrived at the shop they found some people of the labouring class chatting there. If they could get clear of the place somehow, they would come across scattered houses after another two miles, and hence there would be no cause for anxiety. But as soon as the Mother saw the shop, she said from her palanquin, 'Ask them to lower the palanquin for a while; my feet are aching because of sitting long in the palanquin. Get from that shop half a pice worth of oil in a *sal* leaf. Let me rub it on the feet.' Varada was alarmed to hear her speak thus, and he said in a whisper, 'Some doubtful characters are sitting there; you should not get down; you sit there; I shall bring the oil for you.' Then, again, Maku said, 'I am feeling thirsty by eating the fried-rice; I shall drink a little water.' The Mother said, 'Why not drink? Go and do so from yonder pond.' 'To think that she should drink that water!' remonstrated Varada

quickly. But the Mother said, 'So many passers-by are drinking there. It won't do any harm, go! You accompany her and help her to drink.' So they could leave Tantipukur only after purchasing the oil, and getting Maku's thirst quenched.

The party reached Sureshwar Sen's house at Gadadarja in Vishnupur at about two o'clock in the afternoon. Swami Atmaprakashananda and others had preceded them there by bullock-carts at about eight in the morning. They asked, 'Why this delay?' and began laughing at hearing that fried-rice eating was the cause; for the unusual liking for fried-rice of the people of Bankura is a matter of amusement for others. Sureshwar Sen had died a few months ago. The Mother said about him very feelingly, 'Alas! Whenever I came here, my Suresh used to keep standing there with folded hands; he never even got up on the verandah. How great was his devotion!' About him she used to stay at times, 'Suresh was a second Girish Babu, as it were.' The party stayed there the next day also, and started for Calcutta on the third day. They travelled in a third class bogie and reached the 'Udbodhan' at about 9 p.m. on Friday, February 27.

Yogin-Ma and Golap-Ma were extremely concerned to find the Mother's body reduced to a skeleton and accused her companions saying, 'Dear me! How thin she looks! We could never realize that the Mother's health was as bad as this.' Swami Saradananda made all necessary arrangement for treatment from the very next day.

Dr. Kanjilal treated the Mother with homoeopathic medicine from February 28; and the fever subsided on the fourth day. But on the seventh day the temperature again went up to 101°, and the treatment showed no results. Kaviraj Shyamadas Vachaspati was called in on the fourteenth day. This new treatment bore fruit after about a week, from whence the Mother had no fever for a fortnight. This was extremely reassuring, so much so, that the devotees were one day allowed to come in and salute her. But

after fifteen days there was a relapse, and along with that there arose a new difficulty. The Kaviraj prescribed an infusion of several drugs boiled together which was to be taken every morning. This was so bitter that the taste lingered till noon, so that the Mother could not relish any food, and therefore ate very little. The Kaviraj being informed of this said that he was helpless since his system of medicines knew of no drug that was not bitter for this disease. As a last resort Dr. Bepin Behari Ghosh, an allopath, was entrusted with the treatment from April 8. He treated her for about a month; but as no definite result was visible, Dr. Prandhan Bose, a noted physician, was called in on May 1, and the help of Dr. Sureshchandra Bhattacharya and Dr. Nilratan Sarkar was also taken for a proper diagnosis of the disease. At last on May 16, Dr. Bose declared that it was a case of kala-azar. The doctor tried his best to bring the disease under control, but by June 1, it became apparent that the allopathic physicians had given up all hope of recovery. As a last resort, therefore, the indigenous system of treatment was resumed on that date by Kaviraj Rajendranath Sen who was helped by Kaviraj Kalibhushan Sen. Kaviraj Shyama-das Vachaspati, too, came again. His pupil, Kaviraj Ramachandra Mallik, visited the Mother every day and prepared the medicine with his own hands. During the last three days Dr. Kanjilal administered homoeopathic medicines once again.

In fact, from the day that the Mother came to the 'Udbodhan', Swami Saradananda did all that lay in his power to get the Mother restored to normal health. Apart from medical treatment, he tried to enlist in the cause the supernatural agencies also. But there was no sign of improvement in her condition. Her temperature rose three or four times each day, and when it went very high up, she lost consciousness. It was summer, and the excess of bile produced such a burning sensation all over the skin that the Mother used to say, 'I shall dip my body

in the water of a pond covered with weeds.' The attendants cooled their hands over ice and passed them over her body. If there was no ice, the Mother placed her hands on the bare bodies of those who had low temperature. The continuous suffering turned her into a veritable little girl. As she felt no comfort on her bed, she called in her attendant Rashbihari one morning and said, 'Seat me on your lap.' Sarala Devi, another attendant was near at hand, and so Rashbihari said to her, 'Seat the Mother a little on your lap, you are a woman.' As she kept silent, a few pillows were arranged in a pile and the Mother was seated reclining on them; and she was otherwise consoled.

Even in the midst of this ordeal, her tender motherly heart was ever solicitous for the welfare of all. Indeed, it had an even more charming expression at that time. When the attendant came to the Mother in the morning, before going to the Kaviraj's house, to inquire about her condition, she would invariably say, 'Eat before you go; for you will be late in returning.' When the Kavirajas went down after seeing her, she used to say, 'Give to the grandson (Kalibhushan Sen) of the old man (Durgaprasad Sen) some refreshment — some sweets, some mangoes. Give to Ram Kaviraj, and the old Kaviraj (Rajendranath Sen).' The Mother showed the same affection to Drs. Jnanendranath Kanjilal, Durgapada Ghosh, and Shyamapada Mukherji whenever they came; and she made tender inquiries about them and their families. One day when Prabhakar Mukherji and Manindra Bose of Arambagh came, she asked them in a faint voice, 'Are you well, my dears? Shall I live? I can't eat anything and am very feeble.' Then she inquired about that part of the country, 'Has it rained?' Manindra Bose had sent some green palm fruits with a woman named Ramani who was known to the Mother. The Mother remembered the fact and said, 'I didn't know when Ramani came; I was unconscious owing to the fever. Tell her not to be sorry on that account.' Swami Adbhutananda (Latu) was then

seriously ill at Banaras. The Mother was aware of this, and hence she used to ask any one coming from there, 'How is Latu?'

Many were present at the 'Udbodhan' who would feel blessed if they could serve the Mother in any way; but the Mother avoided such service so scrupulously that it was hard to get an opportunity. One day, as she lay down to have a little rest after taking her noon-day diet, an attendant thought that to be an excellent opportunity for fanning her so that she might have a good nap. But he had moved the fan for some four or five minutes only, when the Mother said, 'It's no more necessary; your hand must be aching.' The attendant explained that a hand-fan does not tire one out so easily and that he would stop as soon as it became tiresome. But after a few minutes the Mother reopened her eyes to repeat, 'No, my son, your hand will ache; you stop; I shall sleep without it.' As the attendant did not stop even then, she said soon after, 'My dear boy, I can't have any sleep thinking that your hands will ache. You stop the fan, then I can sleep without any anxiety.' The fan had to be stopped at last; the attendant could serve hardly for ten minutes.

On his first visits Dr. Prandhan Bose was paid sixteen rupees daily as his fees over and above his taxi fare. One day somebody sent for the Mother plenty of fruits, flowers, sweets, and curd. When in the evening the doctor was talking downstairs with Swami Saradananda after examining the patient, some of these things were placed in his car according to the Mother's direction. The doctor looked happy in seeing these presents. Next day when he came for his daily visit, he looked round the room a little more closely to find a picture of the Master there. He was a Christian, but had a very liberal mind, which was moved by all he saw. Going down he asked Swami Saradananda as to who it was that he had been treating all those days. The Swami explained everything and in the course of the conversation told him that the

expenses were being defrayed by the devotees. From that day the generous doctor stopped charging fees; nay, when the treatment was changed a few days later, he kept coming every day, paying the taxi fare himself and spending a good deal of time at the 'Udbodhan' inquiring about his patient.

Equally with her kindness and politeness for all was noticeable her loving behaviour towards all her relatives during the early stages of her illness. In the middle of March, her nephew Ramlal came to see the Mother with his sister Lakshmi Devi and others while on their way to a celebration at Entally in Calcutta. After some time had elapsed in conversation, the Mother told Lakshmi Devi of Yogin-Ma's illness. Lakshmi Devi then went to see her and from there proceeded to Entally without revisiting the Mother, who had, however, been expecting her. Finding at last that they had departed, she told Brahmachari Varada, 'Look here! In the course of the conversation I forgot to give a cloth and some money to Lakshmi. You now go to Entally with Kestolal (Swami Dhirananda) to witness the celebration and give the cloth and money to her. They decorate the Master tastefully at Entally.' With this she ordered somebody to take out two rupees and a piece of cloth with a fine border to be handed over to Varada for presentation to Lakshmi Devi.

In the midst of this suffering, again, she helped her disciples in the path of spirituality and initiated at least one fortunate man. In these matters she paid no heed to warnings that she should not strain herself.

On her sick-bed she had to sustain three shocks. Swami Adbhutananda passed away on April 24, and Ramakrishna Bose, a disciple of the Mother and son of the noted devotee Balaram Bose, departed on May 14. It was decided that in consideration of the Mother's condition, the news should be withheld from her. But Golap-Ma inadvertently divulged it all, with the result that the Mother wept sending up her temperature. She had little sleep that

night. A week after the death of Ramakrishna Bose, uncle Varadaprasad succumbed to pneumonia at Jayrambati. This was also kept back from her. She knew that he was seriously ill, and therefore inquired now and then, 'How is Varada?' But after her brother's passing away, she put a different question. 'Is Varada no more? I saw him standing near the railing (on the verandah) and looking at me.' Then the truth had to be told. This was very poignant to the Mother; she could not control her tears at the loss of this beloved brother.

But we must not merely give attention to her tears and sorrow; we must also take note of her non-attachment. She wept for her brother; but from Brahmachari Gopesh we have an account of what happened only a few days later. Writes he: 'At that time I was very much surprised to hear what the Mother said one day. A few days earlier, uncle Varada had died. Although the Mother was momentarily overwhelmed with grief at that, she soon wiped it away from her mind. She passed on the news to me thus with absolute unconcern, "Did you hear? Varada is dead." At first I failed to understand whom she was talking about, for it was altogether beyond my imagination that she could tell of the death of her very dear brother without any emotion. So I kept on looking at her quizzically. Then the Mother explained, "Father of Fudi (Kshudi) of Jayrambati." The news made me extremely sad; but my surprise at the absence of any pang on the Mother's part was even greater.'

Some still more astonishing events followed to convince the devotees very rudely that the Mother was gradually gliding out of this world of attachment, and that the sweet snares, which she had voluntarily woven round herself, were being rent asunder one by one. When in the middle of March a devotee said, 'Mother, your health has deteriorated badly this time. I never saw your body so weak', the Mother replied, 'Yes, my son, it has become very weak. Methinks, whatever work of the Master was

to be done by this body is over. Now the mind hankers for him only, and likes nothing else. See, for instance, how I loved Radhu, and how much I have done for her happiness and comfort; but now my mood is changed. When she comes to my side now, I feel unhappy and I begin thinking, "Why does she come here to try to drag down my mind?" "The Master kept my mind bound down by all these things for the sake of his work, otherwise could it have been possible for me to stay on after he left?"

The mind was really getting detached. When tossing about in her bed owing to the intense fever, she was often heard to say, 'Take me to the side of the Ganges; I shall feel cooler near the Ganges.' It seemed as if she wanted to be freed from all old associations. Swami Saradananda searched for a house on the bank of the Ganges, and there was talk of taking her to Banaras. But the physicians said that removal at that stage was inadvisable.

So there could be no change of place. But that could not certainly prevent her from getting rid of entanglements. Gauri-Ma and Durga Devi used to visit the Mother every day while returning from their bath in the Ganges. They then sat by her for some time and fanned her. But one day as they came there, the Mother said, 'Don't touch me. Why do you come every day to annoy me—for what purpose, and to see what?' This unexpected indifference came like a bolt from the blue, and Gauri-Ma said imploringly, 'Mother, you are lying ill, and we find no peace of mind. We want to be always by your side, but can't find time. That's why we come once in a day to you.' The Mother still persisted in the same strain, 'What will you gain by coming to me? I can no longer bear to hear anybody's problems.' Then she cooled down and added, 'Even if you come, don't enter my room. See me from outside that door and depart; and don't make me talk on any matter.' Gauri-Ma was thunder-struck! She could speak no more, but shed profuse tears and took leave with a heavy heart. From the next day they came at the usual

time, but without entering the room, sat for an hour at the place indicated by the Mother, and through silent tears communicated the grief in their hearts. The Mother saw all this, but remained remorseless.

Next came Radhu's turn. Yes, Radhu, too, was rejected, though this may sound unbelievable. A few days before the Mother passed into Life Eternal, she said to Radhu, 'Look here! You go away to Jayrambati; don't stay here any longer.' And to her attendant Sarala Devi, she said, 'Ask Sarat to send them to Jayrambati.' Sarala Devi inquired, 'Why do you want them to be sent? Can you live without Radhu?' 'I can do so well enough,' replied the Mother firmly. 'I have dissociated my mind (from her).' When Sarala Devi communicated this to Yogin-Ma and Swami Saradananda, Yogin-Ma asked the Mother, 'Mother, why do you want them to be sent away?' The Mother answered, 'In future they will have to stay there as a matter of course. Hari is going; send them along with him. I have withdrawn the mind, and there's no more need for them.' Yogin-Ma implored, 'Don't you be saying so, Mother. If you withdraw your mind, how shall we live?' But the Mother whose vision was now directed towards the Infinity beyond all delusion, said with disconcerting indifference, 'Yogin, I have discarded all attachment, no more of that.' What more could Yogin-Ma add where pleading was of no avail? Morosely she went to Swami Saradananda and related the whole affair. He drew a deep, heavy sigh and said helplessly, 'Then we can no longer hold back the Mother. Now that she has taken off her mind from Radhu, there's no further hope.' He then said to Sarala Devi who was near at hand, 'All of you try, if the Mother's mind can be brought back a little to Radhu.' But their efforts bore no fruit. On the contrary, understanding their motive the Mother said without any ambiguity, 'Know it for certain that the mind that I have turned back will not come down again.'

As days rolled on, this resolution of the Mother became all the more pronounced and filled everyone with

desperation. Soon after Brahmachari Hari left for Jayrambati, the Mother asked Varada, 'Why did not Radhu, Nalini, and others go away to Jayrambati with Hari? You escort them all there.' Swami Saradananda being informed of this development was quite at a loss to fix upon any course of action. Other devotees, too, thought, 'Radhu is dear to the Mother as the apple of her eye; she is so fond of Radhu that it is hard for her to live one moment without her. Even while on sick-bed she often inquired about Radhu and her son. And now she is eager to send them away to Jayrambati, even though her own condition is so very bad. It all passes one's imagination.' But if people could not understand the Mother's disposition at that time, or they refused to believe what they witnessed, in a short while her determined attitude dispelled all doubts from their hearts. Noticing the Mother's irritation, Nalini Devi dared not approach her any longer, and she shed silent tears. At last she said in dismay, 'If our presence is galling to aunt, we may as well go away. But what will people say? They will think, "Look at this! The Mother is so seriously ill, and these have come away deserting her at this time!"' Swami Saradananda therefore, pleaded with the Mother, 'It will pain them to go away during this illness of yours. They will leave as soon as you recover a little.' The Mother still persisted, 'Well, it will be better if they are sent away. In any case, see that they don't come to me any more. I have no desire to see so much as their shadows any longer.' So completely free had she become! For ten days before the final departure, the Mother slept on a bed spread on the floor. One day at noon when Radhu was asleep and an attendant was sitting by the Mother, nursing her, Radhu's baby Banu got up from sleep and crawling to the Mother's side tried to climb on to her breast, as was his wont, when the Mother said to him, 'I have totally freed myself from all fondness for you. Go, go, you can no longer succeed.' Then to the attendant she said, 'Lift him up and keep him on that side. I don't like these any longer.'

The attendant took the baby into his arms and left it with its grandmother in the adjoining room.

The Mother's condition was worsening. Her frame became so shrivelled that it seemed to be indistinguishable from the bed. The physicians gave up all hope and the Mother, too, realized this. When she suffered similarly on the previous occasion she had said, 'I shall have to suffer likewise over again.' This time, when her affectionate attendant supplicated, 'Mother, you can certainly stay on if you just wish to do so', she simply said, 'Who indeed wants to die?' She had no will of her own then, she had resigned herself entirely to the Divine wishes; and keeping her ears pricked up for the last call she said, 'I shall go, whenever he takes me.' She incarnated for the good of all; and in order to establish contact between her free mind and this world of small interests, she adopted Radhu as a medium with whom she had a tie of affection. Now that tie was cut asunder; and when Radhu came to the Mother's room one day, she said to her, 'I have let loose (my mind) from its post. What will you do to me? Am I a human being?' These were the last words she spoke to Radhu. As Radhu knew the Mother only as a mortal, she did not so much as try to comprehend the meaning of those words uttered so unexpectedly; and the Mother, too, gave her no opportunity to do so.

About a month before the last day, she asked the picture of the Master that she worshipped at the shrine to be removed to some other room, for she explained that it would be presently impossible for her to go out even when necessary, and that a sick-bed and shrine could hardly be in the same place. Her direction was obeyed.

Seven days before the passing away, she sent for Swami Saradananda at about 8-30 a.m. He came and knelt near the Mother's feet on the left side and tried to caress her hand with his. She promptly held his right hand under her left and said, 'Sarat, I leave them all with you', and as quickly drew away her hand. Swami Saradananda

suppressed his tears with difficulty and with a heavy heart moved out of the room, walking slowly backward and keeping his eyes fixed on her.

There were then two classes of attendants—the monks and Brahmacharis, and the women devotees. The monks went to the doctors, brought medicines, procured milk, prepared liquid diets, and fanned the Mother. The women cooked rice, administered the diets, washed clothes, cleaned the bed, and did other things in general. The Mother then behaved like a little girl—she was simple, importunate about trifles, and yet totally without any interest in anything. One midnight as Sarala Devi wanted to feed her, the Mother said petulantly, ‘I won’t eat. You have only two sentences, “Mother, eat”, and “Mother, apply the stick (thermometer)”.’ Sarala had learnt a trick to make her change her mood under such circumstances. She had only to suggest that it would be best to call in Swami Saradananda to rectify any defect that there might have been; and the Mother would at once become reasonable and behave like a good girl. So she tried the remedy tonight and said, ‘Mother, should I then call in Maharaj (Swami Saradananda)?’ The Mother still remained intractable and said, ‘Call Sarat. I won’t eat from your hand.’ Swami Saradananda came immediately. Making him sit by her, the Mother said, ‘Do pass your hand over my body a little, my son.’ And taking hold of both his hands she added, ‘See my son, how much they vex me; they can only say, “Eat, eat”, and they can only apply that stick (thermometer) under the arm. Tell her not to pester me any more.’ Swami Saradananda said softly, ‘No, Mother, they won’t vex you any longer.’ Having consoled her in this way, he said after a little while. ‘Mother, will you eat a little now?’ The Mother said, ‘Give.’ When the Swami asked Sarala Devi to bring the diet the Mother said, ‘No, you feed me; I won’t take from her hand.’ The Swami took the feeding cup in hand and held the nozzle to the Mother’s lips. When she had drunk a little

milk from the cup, the Swami said, 'Mother, rest a while and then drink again.' Greatly pleased at this consideration, the Mother said, 'Just see, how finely he speaks, "Mother rest a while and then drink again!" Don't they know how to speak such a simple thing? Just see how she has worried my son at this dead of night! Go, my son, and sleep.' And with these words she patted his back a little. The Swami arranged the mosquito-net and said, 'Good night, Mother.' The Mother said, 'Good night, my son. Alas, how my son has been disturbed!' Up till then the Swami had been cherishing a desire to render some personal service to the Holy Mother, whose shyness, however, stood in the way. But before she finally took leave of him, she gave him an opportunity to have his desire fulfilled.

That an infinite affection influenced all that the Mother did up to her last moment is proved by her extreme consideration for Swami Saradananda as revealed in the last incident. Her love for Sarala Devi was equally tender as the subsequent event proves. Sarala Devi could well understand the vexation of such a patient at being asked to take diet and to use the thermometer so frequently; and hence she suggested to Swami Saradananda to change the duties. He complied and accordingly Varada and the widow of Navasan did Sarala's duties for two days during which time Sarala Devi kept herself studiously aloof. The Mother did not fail to notice this and made constant inquiries about her. At last at noon of the second day the Mother had Sarala called to herself, and placing the latter's head on her bosom, she said, 'Are you angry with me, my daughter? Don't you mind, my dear, if I have said anything.' Sarala could say nothing, but began shedding tears, and she resumed her duties.

As a result of the disease, the Mother's hands and feet became swollen and she could not move out of the bed. Sudhira Devi of the Nivedita School with her girl students stayed by the Mother's side by turns to fan her and help

the attendants in other ways. There were now only five days left, when a woman devotee known as Annapurna's mother came to see the Mother. But as admission was prohibited to outsiders, she stood at the door-way. Just then the Mother turned over to a side and noticing her there, beckoned her to enter. The devotee came in and said with a choked voice, 'Mother, what will be our lot?' In a very tender but feeble voice the Mother said, 'What fear is there? You have seen the Master. What fear can there be for you?' She stopped for a while and then added slowly and softly, 'But one thing I tell you—if you want peace, my daughter, don't find fault with others. But find fault rather with yourself. Learn to make the world your own. Nobody is a stranger, my dear; the world is yours.' These were the last words of the Mother of the Universe to those afflicted souls for lightening whose burden She incarnated Herself out of Her infinite compassion undergoing all these ordeals of life on earth.

For three days preceding the departure, she hardly spoke, but remained merged in her Self; she felt disgusted at any attempt to drag down the mind to the physical plane. Gradually she stopped talking altogether. To a weeping attendant her last consolation was, 'There's Sarat (Saradananda); don't be afraid.' At last at 1.30 a.m. on July 21, 1920, she drew a few heavy breaths and then entered into *Mahasamadhi*. The long disease had made her frame skeletal, the eyes sunken, and complexion dark. But in the peace and silence of the final departure her face became free from all signs of affliction and regaining its usual fullness shone with ethereal lustre which lasted even when the body became cold, so much so, that owing to that placid brilliance, many on-lookers could not believe that life had become extinct.

Next morning (July 21), under the leadership of Swami Saradananda, the devotees decorated the body with flowers and garlands and carried it on their shoulders singing in chorus the *Rama-nama kirtana*. The procession started

at about half past ten and proceeded from the 'Udbodhan' northward to Baranagore, just opposite the Belur Math. There they crossed the Ganges in boats and laid the body on the bank of the river at the Math. A large number of devotees had gathered there by that time. The women now took charge of the body and bathed it in the sacred water of the Ganges. The pyre of sandal wood was lighted at about three o'clock in the afternoon, on the bank of the Ganges, a few yards north of Swami Vivekananda's temple. The body was offered there as a sacrifice. In the meantime the other bank of the river was overcast with clouds. Then followed a shower. The devotees apprehended that this might interfere with the funeral fire. But nothing happened on the western bank till nightfall. When at dusk all was finished and Swami Saradananda poured out the first pitcher of Ganges water for putting out the fire, a heavy shower came down to extinguish it completely without any further human endeavour. The Mother's corporeal body was there no more, the fire was out, and the devotees slowly returned home with a natural shower of benediction pouring on their heads.

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On that sacred spot was erected a small temple and on the Holy Mother's birthday on December 21, 1921, it was duly consecrated. The Holy Mother is still there receiving daily adoration from her sons and daughters and attracting many others from countries all over the world and filling their hearts with bliss and plenitude.

Peace!

Peace!!

Peace

!!!

If you want peace, don't find fault with others, but find fault rather with yourself. Learn to make the world your own. Nobody is a stranger, my dear; the world is yours.

APPENDIX I

CHRONOLOGY

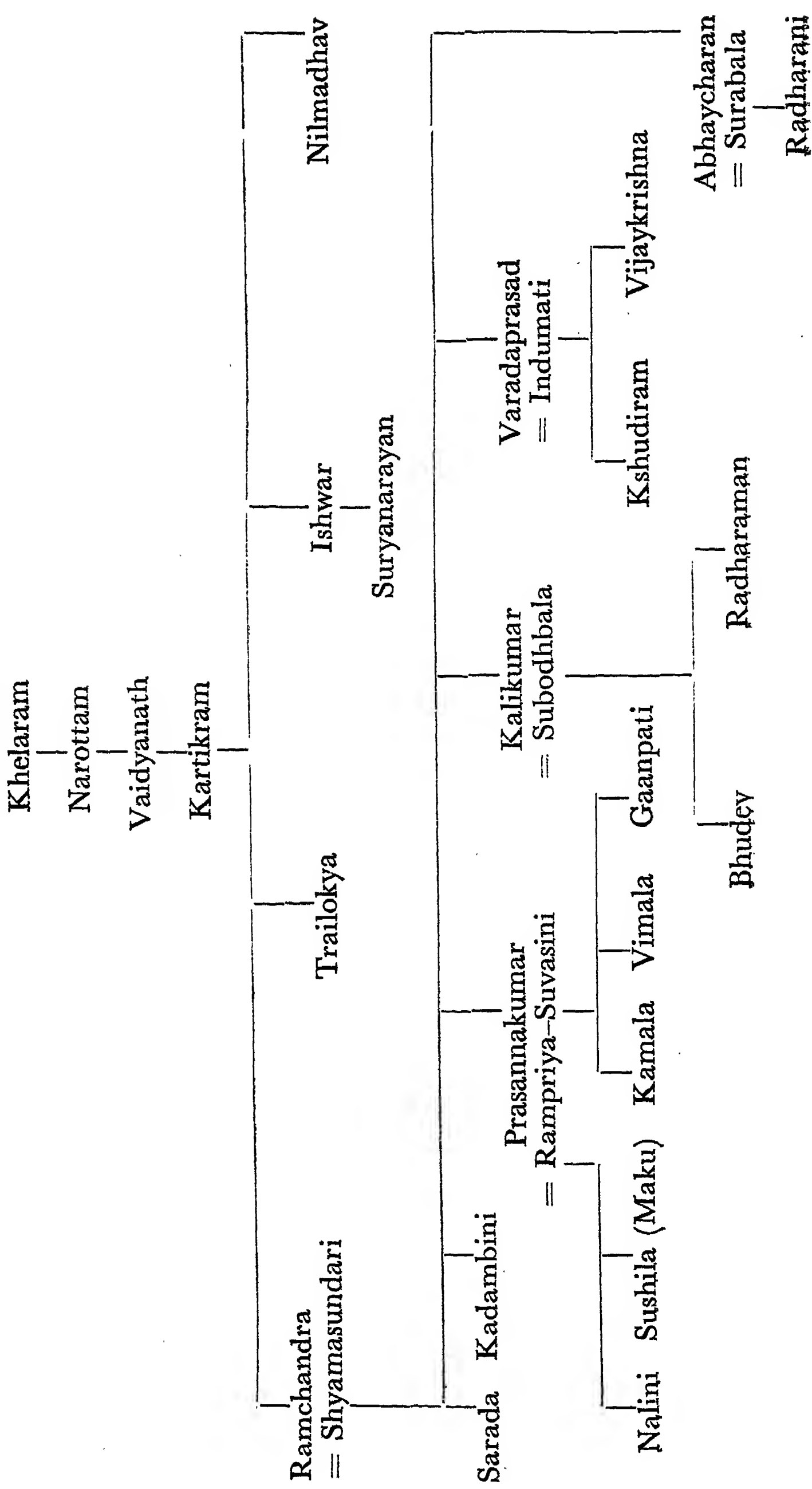
Birth	.. December 22, 1853
Marriage and first visit to Kamarpukur	.. May 1859
Second visit to Kamarpukur	.. December 1860
Third visit to Kamarpukur	.. May (?), 1866
Fourth visit to Kamarpukur	.. December 1866—January 1867
Fifth visit to Kamarpukur (With the Master there)	.. May–November 1867
First visit to Dakshineswar	.. March (?), 1872
Shodasi-puja	.. June 5, 1872
At Jayrambati	.. Middle of 1873
Death of her father	.. March 26, 1874
Second visit to Dakshineswar	.. Middle of 1874
At Jayrambati	.. September 1875
Severe attack of dysentery and awakening of Simhavahini	.. 1875
Commencement of Jagaddhatri worship	.. November 1875
Death of her mother-in-law	.. February 27, 1876
Shambhu Babu's donation of a house	.. April 11, 1876
Third visit to Dakshineswar (Meeting with robbers at Telo-bhelo)	.. January 1877
Fourth visit to Dakshineswar	.. February or March 1881
Hridaya left Dakshineswar	.. June 1881
Fifth visit to Dakshineswar	.. February 1882
Sixth visit to Dakshineswar	.. 1884
Seventh visit to Dakshineswar	.. March 1885
With the Master at Shyam- pukur	.. October 1885
With the Master at Cossipore	.. December 11, 1885
Vow of fast at Tarakeswar	.. During this period
Passing away of the Master	.. August 16, 1886
First pilgrimage to North India (mainly Vrindaban)	.. August 30, 1886

At Kamarpukur (for about nine months)	.. From September 1887
At Nilambar Mukherji's garden (Belur)	.. Up to October 1888
At Puri	.. From November 1888
At Kamarpukur	.. From February 1889
Pilgrimage to Gaya	.. March 25, 1890
At Ghushuri (Belur)	.. May–September 1890
At Jayrambati	.. October 1890
At Nilambar Babu's garden (<i>Panchatapa</i>)	.. 1893
At Kailwar (two months)	.. 1894
Second pilgrimage to Vrindaban	.. 1895
To Kamarpukur and Jayrambati	.. May 13, 1895
At Sharat Sarkar's house, Calcutta	.. April 1896
At Sarkarbari Lane, Calcutta	.. 1896
At Bosepara Lane, Calcutta	.. 1898–99
Opening of the Nivedita School	.. November 12, 1898
Passing away of Swami Yogananda	.. March 28, 1899
At Bosepara Lane	.. 1901–2
Durga worship at Belur	.. 18th–22nd of October, 1901
In Bagbazar Street	.. 1904–5
Second pilgrimage to Puri	.. 1904–5
Death of Shyamasundari Devi	.. End of January 1906
Durga worship at Girish's house	.. October 1907
First visit to the 'Udbodhan'	.. May 23, 1909
At Kothar	.. December 1910
In the South	.. February–March 1911
Marriage of Radhu	.. June 10, 1911
Durga worship at Belur	.. 16th–21st of October, 1912
At Banaras	.. November 5, 1912–January 15, 1913

At Koalpara	.. August–September 1915
In the new house at Jayrambati	.. May 15, 1916
Durga worship at Belur	.. 3rd–6th of October, 1916
At Koalpara (fever)	.. March–April 1918
In Calcutta	.. May 7, 1918
At the Nivedita School	.. December 31, 1918
At Koalpara with Radhu	.. January 30–July 23, 1919
At the ‘ Udbodhan ’	.. February 27, 1919
Mahasamadhi	.. July 21, 1920

APPENDIX II

GENEALOGY OF THE MUKHERJIS OF JAYRAMBATI



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